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Thursday 20 September 2018

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 September 2018

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

Non-domestic Rates Bill

1. **Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con):**

To ask the Scottish Government on what date it plans to introduce its non-domestic rates bill. (S5O-02379)

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): We will bring forward a non-domestic rates bill to implement the recommendations of the Barclay review that require primary legislation in time for the relevant provisions to commence on 1 April 2020.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans will discuss timetabling of legislation and how best to manage the existing and forthcoming legislative workload with committee conveners and business managers over the coming weeks and months.

Bill Bowman: Given the Scottish National Party's record on legislation, by the time that the bill has been passed, Scottish businesses will have paid nearly £400 million more than those in England due to the large business supplement. The Barclay review highlighted the widely held perception that because of that policy, Scotland is not as competitive for business as England—a view that is shared by the Scottish Retail Consortium.

Ministers are prone to ducking this question, but can they today provide a concrete timetable for reducing the large business supplement to the English level?

Kate Forbes: The member will be aware that Scotland is a very competitive place to do business. Our small business bonus scheme is significantly more competitive than reliefs for small businesses elsewhere and we have committed to remove rates for 100,000 premises. Furthermore, from 1 April this year, Scotland has had the edge in attracting new and growing existing businesses. We have ensured that new-build properties pay nothing until they are occupied, and then the new tenant will pay nothing for a year.

In answer to the member's question, Barclay recommended that we lower the large business supplement when affordable. In the meantime, we have focused on supporting small businesses and ensuring that we have measures that are unique in

the United Kingdom, such as the growth accelerator, which applies to large and small businesses.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The Scottish Retail Consortium has noted that many businesses are concerned with the proposed new business rates levy, largely because of the unpredictability that it introduces to the rates system. I ask the minister specifically about the oil and gas industry and its supply chain. Many oil and gas businesses are, through necessity, based near the airport in out-of-town locations. Is it the minister's intention that they, too, will have to pay more?

Kate Forbes: That is a good question. As the member may know, the Barclay consultation closed on 17 September, and I am currently considering and analysing the response. I have also taken it upon myself to ensure that there is separate engagement with all stakeholders and sectors that might be impacted by the recommendations of the independent Barclay review.

The member may also be aware that we established the Barclay implementation advisory group to advise on implementation of the reforms. The group includes representatives from all the key non-domestic rates stakeholder groups. I am happy to share with the member details of who is in that group.

The Barclay consultation sought views on the implementation of that recommendation in particular, including on appropriate safeguards, such as whether there should be a cap on the level of supplement. We will review the response to the consultation and I will report back in due course.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Resources)

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that the Scottish Ambulance Service has sufficient resources. (S5O-02380)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): We have invested almost £900 million in the Scottish Ambulance Service in the past four years. That increased investment is supporting the service to recruit 1,000 additional staff by 2021 and introduce 1,000 new vehicles over the next five years, ensuring that the Ambulance Service has the resources that it needs to deliver high-quality healthcare across Scotland.

Anas Sarwar: I am sure that people throughout the chamber and, I hope, the cabinet secretary would have been shocked to read reports that some paramedics are having to work shifts of 36 hours straight. She should be aware that that is

because of funding cuts, service closures and downgrades across the national health service, which is putting even more pressure on our Ambulance Service. The situation is so bad that staff are now being balloted on industrial action as a result of what they believe are dangerous working conditions.

Will the cabinet secretary please tell us not just what the ambition is for 2020-21 but what steps she is taking right now to ensure that the Ambulance Service is properly resourced and staffed?

Jeane Freeman: I think that Mr Sarwar is probably referring to the situation in the north-east of Scotland, particularly around Moray. I am pleased to advise him that the Ambulance Service has agreed to introduce what it describes as a “protected corridor” for the service from Elgin down to Aberdeen. Some of the additional pressure there has been caused by the current situation with respect to maternity services at Dr Gray’s hospital in Elgin—a situation that I am actively pursuing a resolution to. That protected corridor is precisely what the local ambulance personnel and paramedics asked me to deliver when I met them on 3 August. I am delighted to say that I have been able to do that and the corridor will be introduced from early October.

On the wider context, I have to say that Scottish Ambulance Service staffing is up by 23.9 per cent—just under 24 per cent—the number of paramedics is up by 19 per cent and the number of ambulance technicians is up by 30.4 per cent. In addition, the Ambulance Service has introduced its triage system, which has seen significant improvement in the numbers of individuals who are treated effectively, appropriately and quickly when they have a life-threatening incident or accident.

I am well aware of the pressures that the Ambulance Service is under. I met some of its staff this morning when I was at NHS Forth Valley; I appreciate the significant amount of dedication and skill that those staff bring to our health service. I will continue to work with the Ambulance Service to look at where particular pressure points are and what we might do to assist.

Learning Support (Colleges and Universities)

3. Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what improvements it can make to learning support in further education colleges and universities to make it more effective. (S5O-02381)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Colleges and universities have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable

adjustments to ensure that students with disabilities are not placed at a disadvantage in comparison to non-disabled students. It is an anticipatory duty, which means that education providers should continually review and anticipate the general needs of disabled people, rather than simply waiting until an individual requests a particular adjustment.

As part of the Scottish Government’s work to take forward the recommendations of the independent review of student support, we will conduct a review of non-core and discretionary support, which will include support for students with disabilities.

Maurice Corry: What is the cabinet secretary’s position on the lack of readily available oral exams in Scotland for those who receive learning support, which highlight their talents in a way that written exams often fail to do?

John Swinney: Fundamentally I am sympathetic to the point that Mr Corry raises. Our education system should adapt to meet the particular circumstances and requirements of individuals who have disabilities. My previous answer was designed to indicate in principle our support in that respect.

On specific examination standards, there are issues that the chief examiner for Scotland would have to consider in order to be assured that proper scrutiny was applied to assess qualifications. If Mr Corry wishes to write to me with further details, I would be happy to raise the matter with the chief examiner. She operates independently of Government, but I am happy to raise those issues with her on Mr Corry’s behalf.

Home Ownership (Public Sector Workers)

4. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to a recent Unison report, which states that owning a home has become “virtually impossible” for many public sector workers. (S5O-02382)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests as I am a member of Unison.

I noted the United Kingdom-wide report from Unison and acknowledge that there is an affordability issue for some public sector workers. That is why the Scottish Government operates a range of initiatives aimed at making home ownership more affordable, such as help to buy Scotland and the low-cost initiative for first-time buyers, which have helped more than 28,000 households into home ownership over the past decade. Of those who have been supported into home ownership by those schemes, three quarters are young people aged 35 and under. In addition,

we have delivered more than 76,500 affordable homes since 2007, with almost 52,600 for social rent.

The report also highlights that home ownership for public sector workers is more affordable in Scotland than it is in England and Wales. We will keep it that way as we, the Scottish Government, ensure that we pay the living wage. This year we have lifted the public sector pay cap. We are committed to continuing to offer a fair deal for public sector workers that is also affordable for the public purse.

Pauline McNeill: I thank the minister for that comprehensive answer. He will know that the report, entitled “Priced Out”, indicates that it would take decades for many to be able to save their money for a down payment on a property—it suggests that it would take a minimum of 14 years. The research focuses on salaries for employees in five jobs—national health service cleaners, teaching assistants, librarians, nurses, and police community support officers.

I welcome what the minister said about the help-to-buy scheme and the number of young people it has helped, but the average household income of those using the scheme is £46,000. Is it time to focus the scheme on people on lower incomes so that we can help more public sector workers to aspire to owning their own homes?

Kevin Stewart: I think that we have already done a number of things that ensure that our help-to-buy schemes are aimed at those on lower pay. We have reduced the level of individual funding that we give. Some larger houses are available at great cost in the help-to-buy scheme south of the border; it is not the same here.

We will continue to look at what our help-to-buy schemes are achieving. As I said earlier, the bulk of those folks who benefit from our help-to-buy schemes are young people who are going on to the housing ladder for the first time.

As I pointed out to Ms McNeill previously, our policies here in Scotland mean that those folks working in the public sector are more able to afford to get on to the housing ladder than those in England and Wales and we will continue to ensure that that is the case.

Stranraer Waterfront (Regeneration)

5. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its commitment to fund the regeneration of the Stranraer waterfront. (S5O-02383)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): We remain committed to providing up to £6 million for the

redevelopment of the Stranraer waterfront. The site investigations work at the east pier is now complete and we expect to receive further information from Dumfries and Galloway Council soon on its plans to redevelop the site.

Finlay Carson: On Monday, I facilitated a meeting with stakeholders in Stranraer, who are absolutely determined to get what is best for the town and are growing tired of broken promises. Two and a half years ago, in April 2016, Deputy First Minister John Swinney announced:

“We are committed to regenerating the waterfront in Stranraer with £6 million—bringing new life to the town”.

With the Borderlands deal on the horizon for Dumfries and Galloway, will the minister confirm whether the Scottish Government has been in discussions with Dumfries and Galloway Council? Will he give an undertaking to support the inclusion of a bid for funding for a world-class water sports and marina facility at the waterfront and commit here and now to deliver over and above the £6 million pledged in 2016 to get this project off the ground?

Kevin Stewart: I understand people’s frustrations at having to wait for projects to move forward but, as I have said, the £6 million from the Scottish Government is available and will be spent on Stranraer waterfront.

Let me give Mr Carson a wee insight into what discussions have been happening. Scottish Government regeneration officials visited Stranraer to meet Dumfries and Galloway council officials over the summer. We are now in a position where the site investigations at the east pier are complete, and those findings will inform a revised strategic plan for the site and for the wider Stranraer waterfront area.

At a meeting in July 2018 between regeneration officials and council officials, a request was made for the updated plans to be provided by the end of August 2018. The Scottish Government has not yet received those, although it is our understanding that the council will provide them within the next few weeks. Once we are in receipt of those plans, we will be able to move forward.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): In 2011, when the then First Minister Alex Salmond opened the new ferry terminal at Cairnryan, he made a commitment to the three Rs: regeneration, roads and rail. So far, none of the £6 million for regeneration has been delivered, there has been no meaningful investment in improvements to the A75 or A77 roads and people cannot currently get a train at Stranraer railway station. How is that commitment to the three Rs going for the minister? Frankly, it is not going very well for the people of Stranraer.

Kevin Stewart: I say to Mr Smyth, who is a former member of Dumfries and Galloway Council, that the Government is reliant on the council providing the information that we require to move forward and ensure that the £6 million of investment from the Government is spent well. I am hopeful that Dumfries and Galloway Council will provide the information within the next few weeks. Once we have it, we will be able to move forward, and the £6 million can be invested in the south-west of Scotland.

Automated Teller Machines

6. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of reports of the number of free-to-use ATMs reducing at a record rate, whether it will provide an update on what action it is taking to support communities on this issue, particularly those in remote and rural areas. (S5O-02384)

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): The Government will continue to support the save our cashpoints campaign launched by Which? and the Federation of Small Businesses, although I am disappointed that such a campaign is necessary in the first place. As changes to the ATM network begin to take effect, I urge regulators and providers to be mindful of the importance of ATMs and access to cash in our communities, many of which are still dependent on cash. ATMs play a key role in local communities and economies, particularly for those on low incomes, older people and cash-based small businesses. People in remote and rural areas, with which I am particularly acquainted, that are already affected by bank branch closures are facing a double blow to their ability to access essential financial services.

John Mason: The minister is probably aware that, of the protected ATMs that are not meant to be lost, some 76 have been lost. Although there may be valid reasons for that in some cases, there is an on-going investigation into at least 21 of them. Can the minister and the Government make representations to the United Kingdom Government and Link to prevent further closures of ATMs, especially in remote and poorer areas?

Kate Forbes: I unequivocally make a commitment to the member that I will make representations. As I said, the issue is particularly pertinent in light of the significant number of bank branch closures, which was debated in Parliament this week. My predecessor, Paul Wheelhouse, wrote to Link and the Payment Systems Regulator in support of protecting the ATM network. The latest figures compound the need to protect those essential services. I will happily write once again to the Payment Systems Regulator and Link to

remind them that all consumers should continue to have access to an adequate ATM network.

Public Toilets (Highlands)

7. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to enable the Highland Council to service the 96 public toilets that it has in the Highlands. (S5O-02385)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): The council will receive £487.5 million in Scottish Government funding in 2018-19, which, taken together with the decision to increase council tax by the maximum allowable 3 per cent, means that it will have £17.1 million more to support services this year compared to last year.

I am aware of the concerns that have been expressed about the Highland Council's proposals to close a number of public toilets, and I discussed that with the council leader on 15 June. At that meeting, I made it clear that, although it is for the council to take decisions on its services, the council should engage with local communities before taking any decisions and should consider the potential longer-term impact on tourism in the area, rather than just short-term financial savings. *[Kevin Stewart has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* The council has extended its review until 31 October to allow that to take place, and I welcome that decision.

Edward Mountain: The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, has gone on record to confirm that she has lobbied the Highland Council to keep open the 29 toilets that are threatened with closure. I am pleased to hear that repeated today.

However, there remains real concern throughout the Highlands that the investment in hubs means that the 29 toilets will still close on 31 October. Will the Government join me in continuing to press the Highland Council to keep the loos open? Will it consider further financial help, if that is requested?

Kevin Stewart: I pointed out to Mr Mountain that there is significant additional support this year for the Highland Council, which has £17.1 million more to support services.

It is for the Highland Council, as an autonomous body, to make the decisions that it thinks are right for the Highlands. I hope that the council will listen to people across the area and make the right decision, not only for the people of the Highlands but for the many folk who visit the Highlands.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Schools (Subject Choice)

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): Earlier this year, I challenged the First Minister over the shrinking number of subjects that Scottish school pupils can take. In reply, she said:

"We will continue to work hard with local authorities and with schools to ensure that our young people have the broadest and widest possible choice."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 2018; c 10.]

What progress has she made on achieving that?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We continue to ensure that pupils have the widest possible choice. Of course, the system has changed over the past few years and we now assess the qualifications of young people at the stage when they leave school.

When we look at pupil attainment at the point when pupils leave school, we find two things, which I hope that Ruth Davidson and all members will welcome: first, we find that attainment overall is up in Scotland; and secondly, we find that the gap between the richest and poorest is narrowing. That is what matters, and that is where real progress is being made.

Ruth Davidson: I am not sure that that was much of a progress report on school choice, so let us consider the progress that was presented to the Parliament yesterday, when Professor Jim Scott appeared before the Education and Skills Committee.

Professor Scott talked about the staggering drop in subject choice in our schools following the introduction of curriculum for excellence. Now, more than half of Scottish schools restrict pupils to just six exam courses in secondary 4. Here is the impact: over the past five years, the restricted choices that this Scottish National Party Government has brought in have cost Scottish pupils 622,000 qualifications—that is 622,000 courses that would have been sat but were never sat. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Order, please.

Ruth Davidson: Professor Scott is a former head of 18 years' standing, so the members who are shouting from a sedentary position might want to listen to what he had to say yesterday. He said:

"I actually struggle to say that in a public forum. It is almost unbelievable."

I think so, too. What does the First Minister make of it?

The First Minister: I think that it is entirely unbelievable.

Unfortunately for Ruth Davidson, I have looked closely and with interest at Professor Scott's research. The problem is that when we try to compare the old and new systems it is a bit like comparing apples with oranges. [*Interruption.*] Ruth Davidson might do well to listen to some of this.

Professor Scott focused on awards below higher level. In essence, he was looking at what pupils achieve by the time they finish S4. However, the days of large numbers of pupils leaving school at S4 are long gone; the overwhelming majority stay on to S5 and S6, so we focus on the awards that pupils achieve by the time they leave school. For a young person and their chances of getting an apprenticeship, a college place, a university place or a job, that is what matters, and when we look at that, we see that attainment overall is up and the gap between the richest and the poorest is narrowing.

Here are some figures for Ruth Davidson to chew over. The proportion of pupils who are getting passes at higher level has risen more than 10 percentage points: it was 50.4 per cent in 2009-10 and it was 61.2 per cent in 2016-17. When we look at national 5 level, we find that the proportion of pupils who are leaving school with an award has risen nine percentage points: it was 77.1 per cent in 2009-10 and it was 86.1 per cent in 2016-17. At higher level, the gap between the richest and the poorest has fallen by almost seven percentage points.

Here is one last statistic, which should interest members right across the chamber. It comes from Maureen McKenna, the director of education at Glasgow City Council. She points out that, in Drumchapel high school, which is in what is recognised as one of our more deprived areas, whereas in 2006, 8 per cent of pupils achieved one or more highers by the end of S5, in 2018, the figure was 53 per cent. There has been an increase from 8 per cent to 53 per cent. It is about time that Ruth Davidson stopped talking our schools down and started celebrating the achievements of pupils right across this country.

Ruth Davidson: I can tell that the First Minister does not want to talk about the 622,000 figure. In fact, she would rather talk about anything else. I think that I heard her say at the beginning of her answer that she did not believe it. I go back to the transcript that I have of the evidence that was presented to the Education and Skills Committee yesterday, in which Jim Scott says:

"if things had gone on as they were in 2013, we would have had an extra 622,000 qualifications in Scotland in the five years since."

That is the analysis.

The issue is not just about those 622,000 qualifications that have been lost; it is also about the drop in subject choice and where it is hitting pupils the hardest. Let us talk about schools in deprived areas, because the schools that are most likely to drop down to as few as five subjects in S4, leaving pupils with little room to pursue a rounded education, are in deprived areas.

Dr Marina Shapira of the University of Stirling also gave evidence yesterday. She said:

“The reduction in subject choice is larger in schools in higher areas of deprivation, and the reduction is larger in schools where there are more children on free school meals.”

If we are going to sort out the problem, we need to accept the evidence. Will the First Minister accept the evidence from Dr Marina Shapira?

The First Minister: I will offer some more evidence from the director of education at Glasgow City Council. Just this week, she said that, in 2008, just

“5% achieved 5 or more Highers by the end of S5”.

In 2018, that had increased to what she described as

“an incredible 13.4% an increase of 170%”.

She pointed to another school in Glasgow, St Thomas Aquinas secondary school, where, in 2006,

“29% achieved 1 or more Higher by the end of S5”.

In 2018, that had gone up to 65 per cent.

All the statistics are pointing in the same direction. I am not sure whether Ruth Davidson is saying that, somehow, that does not matter. I repeat that the proportion of pupils who get passes at higher level has risen by more than 10 percentage points. There has been a rise of 9 percentage points in the number of those who get a qualification at national 5 level. In addition, more than 50,000 skill-based qualifications, awards and certificates have been achieved this year, which, incidentally, is double the number of skill-based qualifications that were achieved in 2012.

For added measure, on the subject of closing the attainment gap, just this morning the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service has released new data that shows that Scotland has hit another new record for the number of young people who are getting a university place. Let us start celebrating that success.

I do not think that the Tories have a shred of credibility left on education after the U-turn that they did yesterday, when they voted to scrap primary 1 assessments, which they spent the past four years demanding that the Scottish

Government introduce. Ruth Davidson has zero credibility.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister can bawl and shout the odds all she wants, but there are legitimate questions to be asked about education on her watch, and I will continue to ask them.

In May, the First Minister accepted that the drop in subject choice needed to be addressed. I read out the answer that she gave a few months ago. Today, she is saying that to have half of schools offering only six courses at S4 is absolutely fine.

The point here is that the crash in subject choice that we are now seeing is a symptom of a wider malaise, which has been caused by the chaotic introduction of curriculum for excellence. Under the First Minister’s Government, we have seen reduced subject choice, teachers being left in the dark, the higher pass rate falling and attainment in national exams decreasing by a third compared with attainment on the old standard grades, yet, on education, it shows no sign of listening to the evidence, to the Parliament or to parents or teachers.

More must be done before the damage increases. The solution is a complete overhaul of curriculum for excellence. For once, will the Government listen?

The First Minister: If Ruth Davidson does not like my shouting out the evidence, let me repeat it a bit more quietly for her.

The proportion of pupils who get passes at higher level has increased, as has the proportion who get passes at national 5 level. The number of skill-based qualifications that our young people achieve in schools has doubled since 2012. We have a record number of young people going to university. To me, that sounds like success, and this Government is determined to build on it.

I turn to the curriculum for excellence, which has just been lauded and praised by the International Council of Education Advisers. Week after week, almost, Ruth Davidson stands up here, demanding more information on the performance of pupils in schools. Yet, yesterday, she and her party performed a breathtaking U-turn and voted against assessments in primary 1, which she called for—or demanded—in her party’s manifesto and has demanded at regular intervals since then.

On education issues, Ruth Davidson is a shameless opportunist. I will leave the political opportunism to her. I, the Deputy First Minister and the entire Government will get on with delivering in the interests of pupils right across the country. I think that the people of Scotland will notice the difference.

Education

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):

The Scottish Government still appears to believe that without standardised testing of five-year-olds, teachers will not be able to assess our children's learning needs. Scotland's teachers profoundly disagree. Why does the First Minister believe that she knows more about teaching Scotland's school children than Scotland's school teachers do? (S5F-02602)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I continue to believe that if we set benchmarks for what we think children in primary 1 should be achieving in education, we have a duty to those children, to their parents and to wider society to be able to know whether they are achieving those benchmarks. That is assessed through the judgment of teachers, but it is right that that judgment is informed by the standardised assessments that we have been discussing. I continue to take that view. As the Deputy First Minister said yesterday, he—and we—will reflect on Parliament's judgment of yesterday, and we will come back with a statement in due course.

There is a mix of opinions among teachers. For example, let me read out the opinion of Lindsey Watt, who is a former headteacher at Castleview primary school in Edinburgh, and a winner of the Robert Owen award, which recognises inspirational educators. That teacher said:

"As a teacher of almost 40 years' experience, 25 as a head teacher, I'm confused as to why there has been such a furore over P1 pupils undertaking ... Standardised Assessments.

Various forms of standardised assessments in Primary 1 have been used for many years. The new format has been an attempt to unify the process."

and went on to say that the assessments

"provide an opportunity for schools to access robust additional assessment, providing valuable information to parents about their child's learning journey".

That teacher's opinion is important, as are those of all teachers. However, I am determined that we will raise standards and close the attainment gap. The more information we have to help us to do that, the better. That is my view, which is very strongly held.

Richard Leonard: Last night, Parliament voted decisively to scrap primary 1 tests. We have a First Minister who talks a lot about the will of Parliament when it is in the interests of her party. I hope that she will listen to the will of Parliament when it is in the interests of Scotland's children.

Teachers say that the tests are a waste of time, but the Government says—we have just heard it again—that it will carry on regardless. The First Minister always accuses others of talking Scotland down. I only wish that she would stop talking down

to Scotland's teachers and start valuing them. This week, Scotland's teachers have rejected the Government's latest pay offer. If the First Minister will not listen to teachers on primary 1 testing, will she listen to them on pay?

The First Minister: We will continue to negotiate on pay through the standard processes. That is what we would be expected to do and it is, rightly, what we will do.

I will go back to standardised assessments. It is interesting that Richard Leonard is quite selective when it comes to respecting the will of the Scottish Parliament. [*Interruption.*] Let us focus for a moment on the will of the people in an election. In the 2016 Parliament election, two thirds of voters voted for manifestos that contained a commitment to standardised assessment in primary 1. I do not know whether Richard Leonard thinks that that should just be cast aside, but I do not.

We will reflect on what the Parliament said yesterday and we will make a judgment based on what we think is right for the interests of young people throughout Scotland. Our consideration will not be party-political opportunism; it will be in the best interests of pupils in Scottish classrooms.

Richard Leonard: Nicola Sturgeon says that education is the driving and defining priority of her Government. She says that she wants to be judged by her record on it, so let us look at the record: £400 million has been cut from school budgets, the testing policy is in tatters, the flagship education bill was ditched, and Scotland's teachers are on the verge of strike action. I ask the First Minister why, if education really is the top priority, the Government's education policy is in such a mess.

The First Minister: I am delighted to be able to share all the following information with Parliament again.

There is a higher proportion of pupils passing exams in Scotland and more pupils are getting highers, national 5 qualifications and skills-based qualifications. The gap between rich and poor pupils is closing and more young people, including young people from our deprived areas, are going to university. That is a success, and it is success on which we are determined to build.

I have said, and will say again, that education is our top priority. We want to be judged on that—but do you know what? For us to be judged on it, it is important that we have the information that tells Parliament and Scotland whether we are succeeding. We have the information when it comes to exam passes. I want to have such information from the early stages of primary school so that we know that we are not letting down young people. We simply should not leave it too late to act and to intervene if young people need

extra help. That is why assessments in primary 1 are the right thing to do. Two thirds of the people who voted in the last election agreed with that. That is rather important.

Paediatric Services (NHS Lothian)

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): The *West Lothian Courier* recently reported on the plight of the McKenzie family from Breich in the more rural part of my constituency. The family attended St John's hospital with their sick baby and, after a three-hour wait for an ambulance, were eventually transferred to the Royal hospital for sick children because the children's ward at St John's remains closed to in-patients. The baby was discharged at 11 pm and the family was left to walk into the city centre to catch the last bus to Livingston and then get a taxi home to Breich, arriving at 1:30 am. That, of course, is all contrary to the commitments that have been made by NHS Lothian to provide transport support to local families.

Given that baby Kenzie is one of 788 West Lothian children to have been transferred from St John's to the sick kids hospital, how will the First Minister and the Government ensure that NHS Lothian—specifically, its paediatrics programme board—does absolutely everything, and more, to return our much-loved first-class children's ward to a 24/7 service as soon as possible?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I assure Angela Constance that the Government will work closely with NHS Lothian to ensure that the ward is reopened as quickly as possible. The acting chief executive of NHS Lothian assured Jeane Freeman on 28 August that all efforts are being made to recruit medical staff and advanced nurse practitioners in order to reinstate the in-patient unit. The current situation relates to ensuring patient safety; I do not think that any member of Parliament would irresponsibly suggest that patient safety should not be paramount.

I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to look into the case that Angela Constance has raised and will keep her and other members who have an interest updated on progress on getting the in-patient unit reopened as quickly as possible.

Freight (Orkney and Shetland)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): last week, a full-blown crisis for Shetland's aquaculture and shellfish sectors was averted only at the 11th hour by Northlink Ferries Ltd's ability to charter an extra freight vessel, which allowed vital time-sensitive shipments to be made.

This is also a critically important period for Orkney's livestock sector, which is looking to ship

most of its cattle and sheep to the Scottish mainland. As Malcolm Scott from Orkney Auction Mart Ltd said to me earlier today, had Northlink not secured the Arrow, the potential consequences for farming in Orkney would have been disastrous.

Does the First Minister accept that meeting the growing freight needs of linchpin industries in Orkney and Shetland requires access to a third freight vessel on an on-going basis? Will she ask her Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity to consider seriously proposals that have been made that could increase freight capacity on the northern isles and west coast routes, as well as potentially freeing up additional space for passenger traffic?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Liam McArthur for raising an important issue. I understand the demands that are being made for increased freight capacity, and I will ask the transport secretary to consider the proposals that have been made and brief me on his views on those, and to correspond with Liam McArthur on the way forward. The transport secretary will revert to the member as soon as possible.

Royal Hospital for Sick Children (Contamination)

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): This week, we learned of the third contamination affecting the cancer ward at the Royal hospital for sick children in a short space of time. The contamination has resulted in drinking water and washing facilities being affected, patients who are already immunocompromised being prescribed antibiotics, patients being transferred to local hospices or having to go home to get a wash, and treatments being delayed.

One angry and distressed parent, Donna-Louise Hurrell, contacted me directly and told me that her daughter has now had her chemotherapy delayed on three separate occasions. She asked me to ask the First Minister how many cases of chemotherapy have been delayed due to bacterial and safety concerns affecting the hospital. Can the First Minister address that question directly, and also ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to instigate an urgent investigation of that hospital, to get full answers and to ensure full transparency in the interests of the patients, their families and the wider community, and to guarantee that we can minimise the risk of this ever happening again?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The situation is deeply regrettable. On the number of cases, I do not have that information to hand. However, I will undertake to ensure that the information is provided to Anas Sarwar.

The primary concern of the health board and the Scottish Government is the safety and wellbeing of children and their families at the hospital. We are aware of the new cases that have been linked to the incident, and the families who are involved have been kept fully informed. It is right that that continues to happen.

At the moment, we are liaising closely with Health Protection Scotland and Health Facilities Scotland. Both organisations are supporting NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to ensure that all appropriate steps are in place to manage the incident.

Although no patients with bacterial infections are currently giving cause for concern, it is very important that all precautions are taken to prevent any further infections.

I undertake to provide the information that Anas Sarwar asked for, and I will also ask the health secretary to keep him and Parliament updated on the situation.

A77 (Closures)

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): The First Minister will be aware of the issues at Ayr Station hotel and the severe disruption to rail services south of there, which are pushing even more traffic onto the already overloaded A77.

Are the First Minister and her Government aware that there are plans to close the A77 several times over the next few weeks for urgent resurfacing works, which will, in effect, cut off the south-west? Although we do not want the resurfacing works to be postponed, given the road's appalling state of disrepair, there must surely be a better plan—one that takes into account the travel needs of the population in the south-west, which includes the replacement bus service, and which takes account of the huge volume of freight traffic that uses that road.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I understand the difficulties that are being posed by the situation with Ayr Station hotel. Brian Whittle says that he thinks that the resurfacing works should not be postponed, which obviously limits the options. However, Transport Scotland and others who are involved must, of course, look closely at such decisions to ensure that disruption is minimised. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity will take a close interest in the matter, and I will happily ask him to correspond with the member about it.

We have, in previous weeks, talked about the situation at Ayr station. A proposal was made about car-parking spaces at Prestwick airport, which has been taken forward. We will continue to do whatever we can to minimise the disruption that the situation is causing, which includes

considering some decisions around works on the A77.

I hope that that answer is helpful. The transport secretary will be happy to provide further information.

Tay Cities Deal

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my serious concerns over reports in *The Courier* earlier this week that the United Kingdom Government is planning to renege on the Tay cities deal? That would see the UK Government reduce its contribution to the deal by a reported £80 million. Will she raise the matter urgently with the UK Government to ensure that it delivers on its part of this crucial deal?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I understand the concern. Cities and their regions play a crucial role in driving economic growth, which is why the Scottish Government is working individually and collectively with our cities, regions and the businesses and individuals within them to boost that growth.

All partners have invested a huge amount of work in their proposals for the Tay cities deal and delivering for the regional economy. We continue to encourage the UK Government to match the Scottish Government's investment in the Tay cities deal. The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to achieving a heads of terms agreement as soon as possible. We are in a position to proceed right now and are waiting for the UK Government to confirm its position. I hope that that happens soon and that the commitment of the UK Government is not diminished.

I had the privilege of attending the opening of the V&A last Friday. It will be transformational for Dundee. It would be a deep shame if that momentum could not continue with the Tay cities deal being resolved as quickly as possible. The Scottish Government is ready to go. The question that remains to be answered is whether the UK Government will stick to its commitment. I hope that the answer to that is yes.

Demonstrators (Police Scotland)

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I hope that the First Minister is aware of revelations that have been published by *The Ferret* and *The National* that campaigners against fracking are among the peaceful, democratic campaigners who have been labelled by Police Scotland as "domestic extremists". We have known for years that environmental campaigners, along with peace activists and others, have in the past been spied on or infiltrated by police forces in the United Kingdom, including in Scotland. This statement of current practice, however, is shocking.

Anti-fracking campaigners who exercise their democratic right to protest are heroes, yet Police Scotland is labelling them as “domestic extremists”. When did the First Minister or her Cabinet Secretary for Justice become aware of this, and what action has the Government taken to address it?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I absolutely support the right of peaceful democratic protest. I have taken part in many peaceful democratic protests, including at Faslane against nuclear weapons. I will defend the right of people to demonstrate, whether they are protesting against fracking or nuclear weapons or anything else. As long as they do that peacefully and democratically, I defend their right to do so. It is for the police to answer for the operational decisions that they take, but that is my view. I am happy to state that view unequivocally today.

Patrick Harvie: We should not accept that this is merely an operational matter. If individuals, campaign groups and communities cannot peacefully campaign on issues that matter in our society without being labelled as “domestic extremists”—the same category used to describe the threat that is posed by racist and fascist forces in our society—it strikes at the heart of the relationship between policing and the public. That is clearly a political question.

The First Minister mentioned Faslane. This weekend, I will join members of my party, as well as members of the Scottish National Party and, I am sure, Labour and many others, at Faslane again to protest about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Scotland, just as people have worked across party lines to oppose blood sports, environmental destruction, asylum evictions and more. The right to do so freely is fundamental to a democratic society.

Can the First Minister give an assurance that campaigners at Faslane on Saturday will not be designated as “domestic extremists” merely for attending a peaceful rally?

The First Minister: Let me give my view. If I were to start to speak in the chamber on behalf of Police Scotland, there would be all sorts of justifiable and legitimate criticisms of me for doing so. I am happy to ask the chief constable on behalf of Police Scotland to address the point that Patrick Harvie has raised.

To return to my view on the issue, I do not consider people who protest against nuclear weapons, fracking or anything else in a peaceful and democratic way to be extremists in any sense, and I would not expect anybody to consider them to be extremists.

Patrick Harvie is absolutely right to say that peaceful protest is a fundamental part of

democracy. People should have the right to protest, as long as they do so peacefully. That applies to the people who will be at Faslane on Saturday. I wish them well. I look forward to the day when there are no nuclear weapons on Scottish soil at Faslane, and the sooner that day arrives, the better. The right to protest also applies to people protesting against fracking or campaigning on any other issue. That is my very firm view, and one that I hope has the support of members across the chamber.

Brexit (People’s Vote)

4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I congratulate the First Minister on being so bold and radical this morning: she now wants to delay Brexit by a few weeks. That will definitely save us from colossal economic damage. Despite growing calls for a final say on the deal, the First Minister continues to dither. Does she not understand that we do not just need a delay to Brexit but need to stop it dead in its tracks?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I do not want Scotland to be dragged out of the European Union against its will—I do not want it to happen in March, I do not want it to happen in April and I do not want it to happen at all. However, nothing that Willie Rennie has ever said on the issue would give Scotland a guarantee that in future we will not be dragged out of the EU against our will.

I will make an offer to Willie Rennie as somebody who supports the idea of a people’s vote. Yesterday, I again said that the Scottish National Party will not stand in the way of that. However, if Willie Rennie wants me to be an enthusiastic advocate of such a vote, let him explain to me how it would guarantee that we will not simply find ourselves in the same position we found ourselves in June 2016, when Scotland voted to remain in the EU but the rest of the United Kingdom voted to leave. If he can explain right now how Scotland is guaranteed that it will not find itself in that position, I am happy to talk to him further about the matter.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister should be preparing for victory, not defeat. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Willie Rennie: We would have a better chance of winning the people’s vote if we had the Scottish Government on board. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Willie Rennie: Every day the First Minister dithers gives comfort to those who want a hard Brexit. Being neutral on the question of having a people’s vote undermines the positive way out of this situation.

Sadiq Khan supports a people's vote, hundreds of Labour delegates want it and former Conservative ministers back it. Even the Czech Republic and Malta are on board, and the last time I looked, they were small independent countries. Support is building. On Saturday, there will be a people's vote rally in Stirling. An SNP speaker will be at that rally. Will he be backing the people's vote campaign, telling them that they are wrong or dithering just like the First Minister?

The First Minister: Willie Rennie failed to answer the question that I posed, which I thought was notable. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order, please. Keep it down.

The First Minister: Willie Rennie said that we should be preparing for victory. I campaigned for victory in the EU referendum in 2016, and I helped to secure a 62 per cent vote to remain in the EU. Do you know what, Presiding Officer? It did not count for anything, because the rest of the UK voted to leave.

If I am to get enthusiastically behind the campaign for another EU vote, surely it is not unreasonable to ask for a guarantee that Scotland would not find itself in that position all over again. The fact of the matter is that Willie Rennie and others campaigning for a people's vote are unable to give that guarantee. If they are prepared to give such a guarantee, I am happy to get behind the campaign. However, it seems to me that, right now, there is only one thing that can stop Scotland having these decisions imposed on it against its will, and that is for Scotland to be independent. Maybe it is time that Willie Rennie started to support that.

Superfast Broadband

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Thousands of my constituents face being bypassed by the digital revolution and will be unable to access high-speed broadband services, according to Audit Scotland. Indeed, large parts of Scotland are unlikely to secure superfast internet speeds by the Scottish Government's deadline of 2021, with rural communities likely to be hit hardest, 376,000 households still lack high-speed services and more than 221,000 properties, including many businesses, will not have access to the network before 2021.

Can the First Minister give my constituents a promise that her Government will publish a clear timescale for the R100—reaching 100 per cent—programme by the summer of 2019, or will this be yet another example of the SNP Government's habit of making big announcements—[*Interruption.*—and then failing to deliver them two or three years down the line?

The Presiding Officer: Will members please allow other members to ask their question?

The First Minister: It might have been a good idea for the member to have read the Audit Scotland report before coming to the chamber. I will share some snippets with him. However, let me start with what Fraser McKinlay from Audit Scotland said on "Good Morning Scotland" earlier today:

"The good news is that the Scottish Government has achieved its target to provide access to fibre broadband to 95 per cent of homes and businesses across Scotland by the end of last year and they did that well."

Page 5 of the Audit Scotland report says:

"Higher than expected take-up and lower than expected costs mean 60,300 additional premises will gain access to the fibre network at no extra cost to the public sector".

Page 8 of the report says:

"By the end of 2017, 95 per cent of premises in Scotland had access to fibre broadband ... Without public-sector investment, only around two-thirds of premises in Scotland would have access".

Let us remember that the 100 per cent commitment, in terms of both coverage and broadband speeds, will take us ahead of any other part of the UK. When asked a specific question about that this morning, Fraser McKinlay said:

"we are definitely not saying that won't be achieved by 2021".

We are investing £600 million in the R100 procurement programme. The procurement will be let next year.

The Scottish Government is investing £600 million, but despite the fact that this is a reserved matter, the UK Government is investing just £21 million—a mere 3 per cent of the total. Finlay Carson should take that up with his Tory colleagues in Westminster before he comes lecturing the Scottish Government on a programme that we are delivering—and, according to Audit Scotland, delivering well.

Brexit

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Last night, the Prime Minister told European Union leaders that she had put forward serious proposals on Brexit. However, all that is on the table is no deal or a blind Brexit, and both of those would seriously damage Scotland's interests. Does the First Minister think that those are serious proposals or just seriously misguided ones?

The First Minister: Brexit is a mistake and the handling of Brexit by the UK Government is complete and utter shambles. I think that I am quoting a Tory MP when I say that the Chequers proposal is as "dead as a dodo". Although the Prime Minister wants to frame the choice that is

coming later this year as one between no deal or Chequers, it is increasingly likely that the choice will be between no deal and no-detail deal, in which the statement about the future relationship after Brexit is vague and no one knows what comes after EU membership.

It would be reckless in the extreme for the UK to take a step off the Brexit cliff edge, in effect wearing a blindfold and with no idea where we are going to land. In those circumstances, it would be far more responsible to extend article 50 so that all the alternatives can be properly considered.

We are long past the stage where we can expect sensible proposals from the Government. The UK Tory Government is intent on recklessly taking the whole country off the Brexit cliff edge. Future generations will judge it extremely harshly for that.

Decommissioning Work (Dundee)

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I add my voice to the calls to break the deadlock over the Tay cities deal.

The First Minister knows that, as part of Dundee's regeneration and our superb new V&A, the city is bidding for decommissioning work to create good jobs. Why will the First Minister not publish the EY report that details why Dundee did not get decommissioning investment in her programme for government, so that Dundee can better understand her Government's analysis of that economic opportunity?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will come back to the member on the EY report. We remain committed to securing jobs in decommissioning in a range of other areas for Dundee. I think that, right now, assuming that the United Kingdom Government stops dragging its feet over the Tay cities deal, there is every reason to be really optimistic about the future of Dundee.

Of course, the Scottish Government was the principal funder of the V&A, of which I know the member attended the opening on Friday as well, but we have also put the headquarters of the new social security agency in Dundee, delivering hundreds of jobs in the city. Whether it is through the social security agency, our support for the V&A or our continued support for jobs in a host of other areas, this is a Government that is full square behind Dundee, and we will continue to be so.

Poverty (Social Metrics Commission Framework)

5. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government will use the Social Metrics Commission's new framework for tackling poverty. (S5F-02618)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We welcome the work of the Social Metrics Commission to further develop our understanding of poverty. I note that the commission states that the United Kingdom Government's political debate has focused on the measurement of poverty rather than on the action that is needed to drive better outcomes, and it calls for

"energy into creating pathways out of poverty."

Of course, the opposite is the case for this Government. We are committed to action, having already set our statutory targets.

The UK Government has scrapped its child poverty targets, scrapped its poverty unit and scrapped the child poverty commission. It is also presiding over the disastrous roll-out of universal credit and welfare cuts that will see more children pushed into poverty. This Government, by contrast, is focused on actions that will reduce child poverty and tackle deep-seated inequalities.

Dr Allan: I thank the First Minister for that answer. On that specific issue, the report shows that Scotland does better in working to address child poverty than the rest of the UK does. Is it not the case, however, that while Scotland lacks full powers over employment laws and social security, we are tackling the problems with one hand tied behind our back, in the face of even deeper cuts to welfare from a visibly uncaring UK Government?

The First Minister: Yes. That is absolutely right. While we work to try to lift children out of poverty, UK Government welfare policy in particular is actively pushing families and children into poverty. There are independent reports that show that more than one in three children could be living in poverty by 2030. That is squarely due to UK welfare cuts, which by 2020 will amount to almost £4 billion a year for Scotland.

While the UK Government is ignoring child poverty, we are getting on with tackling inequalities and taking action to meet our child poverty targets. In March, we published "Every child, every chance", which is our four-year programme of action to reduce child poverty. Since then, we have announced the early introduction of best start grant payments and the new minimum school clothing grant of £100, all of which provides crucial help for parents. However, there is no doubt whatsoever that, with more powers over welfare, we could do so much more—and, of course, an independent Scotland could do so much better.

Breast Screening Programme

6. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will provide an update on the Scottish breast screening programme, in light of reports

that many women were not contacted for their final check-up. (S5F-02607)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): A review of the Scottish breast screening programme by the Scottish clinical task force identified 1,761 women aged over 70 who were not invited for their final breast screening appointment. I can tell the Parliament that all those women have now been sent a letter advising them of what has happened and offering them an opportunity to attend for breast screening. All women affected who wish to have breast screening will receive an appointment for screening before the end of October this year. We will ensure that any additional screening will not displace other women who are due for their screening appointments.

Work is also being taken forward to develop an information technology fix to address the specific issue. Arrangements are in place to manually identify any women who may have been missed for that reason until that IT fix is in place.

Jamie Greene: I thank the First Minister for that update, but it misses a crucial fact, which is that the situation was predictable. In 2016, a review by Healthcare Improvement Scotland found that nearly 4,000 women had not been sent screening invitations, and as a result it made a number of recommendations, one of which was better oversight of that IT system.

In May this year, the former health secretary told the Parliament:

"I reassure members and the public that the issue does not affect the NHS in Scotland. Patients should be reassured that there are no problems with our breast screening programme records or information technology systems."—[*Official Report*, 2 May 2018; c 40.]

Why was the 2016 recommendation ignored? What reassurances can the First Minister give that the screening programme IT system is and will be fit for purpose?

The First Minister: My understanding is that the 2016 issue is a separate issue, so I am not sure that it is accurate to say that what happened was "predictable", to use the word that Jamie Greene used.

On the English breast screening programme, the former health secretary, Shona Robison, sought and received assurances at the time that the issue was not being repeated in Scotland. However, she rightly requested further due diligence checks. The clinical task force was established to support Public Health England in identifying and contacting any women living in Scotland who were affected. That task force also carried out a wider review.

The issue that we are talking about is an unrelated and separate one. As a result of that

issue, we discovered that 1,761 women had not been invited for the final screening appointment. I apologise to each and every one of those women. That should not have happened. However, it is important to put this in context. Although it does not, of course, reduce the anxiety for any of those individual women, they are around 0.2 per cent of the approximately 700,000 women who are eligible for breast screening in Scotland and are invited every three years.

The issue came to light because of the action that the previous health secretary took at the time of the announcement in England. As I said in my original answer, all the women are now being offered appointments for screening, and an IT fix is being put in place to ensure that what happened does not happen in the future.

I hope that that answer gives some comfort to the women who missed their final screening appointment and to the wider population of women who go for breast screening.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time. We will shortly move on to a members' business debate on a motion in the name of Liam McArthur, on Scotland's marine energy industry. However, we will first have a short suspension to allow members to leave the chamber, members of the public to leave the public gallery, and new members of the public to arrive.

12:46

Meeting suspended.

12:49

On resuming—

Marine Energy Industry

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-13815, in the name of Liam McArthur, on Scotland's marine energy industry has potential to grow. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of maintaining Scotland's global lead in developing wave and tidal stream technologies; acknowledges the wider set of socio-economic benefits associated with these technologies, such as the GVA and job potential set out by the ORE Catapult report, *Tidal Stream and Wave Energy Cost Reduction and Industrial Benefit*, published in 2018; further recognises what it considers the important role that marine renewables need to play in the mix of technologies that will be required to meet Scotland's energy needs and climate change commitments; celebrates the successes of the industry to date, including Scotrenewables Tidal Power's successful full year of continuous testing in the sea around Orkney, which it considers has played a leading role in the development of marine renewables over the years; notes the contribution of the Scottish Government's Ministerial Marine Energy Group in supporting the sector, and notes calls for the Scottish Government to do everything in its power to support the further development of the industry and continue to make the case to the UK Government to introduce a programme of market support for tidal energy in the UK, in order that Scotland continues to be the home of tidal technology.

12:50

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Back in February 2015, I led a similar debate on the future of Scotland's wave energy industry. At the time, we were reeling from the sudden demise of Pelamis and Aquamarine Power and from what appeared to be a crisis of confidence about, and even an existential threat to, the future of marine renewables.

I reminded the chamber of the many reasons to be proud of what we had already achieved, including world's firsts and world's onlys, and the reasons to be confident about what could be achieved in the future. I called for bravery, vision and commitment from ministers and politicians north and south of the border, and I repeat that call this afternoon, at what Scottish Renewables has described as "a critical juncture" for the marine energy industry in this country.

I am grateful to all those who signed my motion for allowing the debate to take place, and I am particularly grateful to colleagues who have spared the time to contribute to what I hope will be a constructive and productive exchange of ideas. The wave and tidal energy sectors undoubtedly

face serious challenges, which should not be underestimated. I will return to those challenges shortly and look at what might be done to mitigate or overcome them.

First, though, it is helpful to remind ourselves why the development of marine renewables matters and why it matters that they develop here in Scotland. Scotland has, of course, played a leading role in setting stretching climate change targets. That has been achieved on a cross-party basis and, as new climate change legislation begins its journey through Parliament, I am confident that the same consensual but ambitious approach will be taken again. Any future targets will, of course, require the further decarbonisation of our energy system. Although the focus will be—quite rightly—on heat and transport, where too little progress has been made to date, we also have a way to go with regard to generation. In that context, a mix of technologies, including storage, will be needed. I believe that wave and tidal energy will have an important role to play in that future energy mix, helping to displace carbon generation from the grid.

That belief stems from a view that we should play to our strengths—and marine renewables certainly does that. It plays to the strengths of our natural resources: Scotland is home to 25 per cent of Europe's tidal stream and 10 per cent of its wave resource. It plays to the strengths of our academic research base: our universities are world leading in the expertise that they have developed over the years. To me, Heriot-Watt University exemplifies that—and I say that as an Edinburgh university graduate. I have a shameless plug for the reception that I will host on 3 October, which will showcase Heriot-Watt's interdisciplinary work on the blue economy and how we can balance the different, sometimes competing, uses of our marine environment in sustainable ways. Through its Stromness campus in Orkney, which hosts the international centre for island technology, Heriot-Watt has been in the vanguard on marine renewables and, more recently, taken a lead on how green energy systems are managed, including, crucially, the use to which that energy is put.

All our universities have contributed to our other great strength, namely, the skills and expertise within the supply chain. The ICIT provides a perfect illustration of that, producing graduates who are at the forefront of the achievements of Scotrenewables Tidal Power—a company whose tidal stream turbine recently clocked up more than 3GW of renewable electricity in its first year of testing at the European Marine Energy Centre. Indeed, EMEC is a further example of how Scotland, and Orkney, have taken a global lead in marine renewables, offering the means for

developers to test their devices at scale and in a real-life environment.

Those key strengths—in research, supply chain and natural resources—should give us cause for optimism about realising our climate change ambitions and about potential job and wealth-creating opportunities, not least through exporting products and services internationally. The Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult recently published a report that underscored that potential, reinforcing the fact that the economic benefits could and should be felt most significantly in coastal and island communities. However, that optimism must be tempered by a recognition of the challenges that face our wave and tidal industries.

As Scottish Renewables points out in its briefing,

“there is currently an absence of policy certainty and viable routes to market for many wave and tidal technologies”.

In the case of wave energy, we have seen a retreat back into the lab and a move away from funding specific companies and arrays. Sensibly, Wave Energy Scotland is attempting to support research and development that will benefit all developers and avoid costly duplication of effort. That serves to illustrate that we are talking about technologies that are still in the innovation phase. Even tidal energy projects, which are much further along the road in their development, fall into that category. Although Scottish Renewables argues that tidal stream is on the brink of developing from pre-commercial to fully commercial arrays, cost reduction is still needed.

We need to see that reflected in the support made available, particularly by the United Kingdom Government. I will not repeat the criticisms that I and others have made of the UK Government’s seeming ambivalence to renewables since 2015, which is in contrast to the strong support provided by my Liberal Democrat colleague Ed Davey during his period as energy secretary.

Inviting tidal stream projects to bid against offshore wind for contracts for difference makes no sense. Both may constitute marine renewables developments but only in the broadest sense. A competitive mismatch on that scale simply risks tidal developments being throttled at birth. A much better approach would be to challenge tidal developers and, in due course, wave developers to bid against other technologies—including storage—in an innovation category. That would chime with the UK Government’s stated and welcome commitment in its industrial strategy to promote innovation.

Hopefully I have managed to persuade colleagues on the Tory benches of the merits of such an approach and they will now agree to join

in making representations to the UK Government along those lines.

From our previous discussions on this topic, I know that the minister shares that view, but I would encourage him to look at what more the Scottish Government can do to incentivise innovation in ways that help to bring the commercial deployment of marine renewables closer to reality.

I repeat what I said earlier. The development of marine renewables plays to our competitive strengths: our natural resources, our research and industrial skills, and the world lead that we have already established. It provides an opportunity to create jobs and wealth, including in communities such as the one I represent. It is part of the mix of technologies that will be needed if we are to meet our challenging climate change targets.

I very much look forward to the contributions from the minister and other members. I hope that, as we did with the debate in 2015, we can send out a strong, decisive message from this Parliament about our collective determination to stay the course when it comes to wave and tidal energy.

12:57

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I thank Liam McArthur for bringing this important topic to the debating chamber and refer members to my entry in the register of interests regarding renewable energy.

As we all know, renewable energy is the future. It is the way forward to protect our environment while enabling our society to continue. The Scottish Conservatives recognise that Scotland must maintain its lead in developing renewable energy technologies, including wave and tidal stream.

As an MSP from the north-east of Scotland, I must mention how delighted I have been at the recent opening of Vattenfall’s European offshore wind deployment centre off the coast of Aberdeen—a feat of engineering, innovation and technology that will produce enough electricity to meet the annual power demand of 80,000 British households. Offshore developments such as that have an important role to play in diversifying the energy mix, as well as in the decarbonisation of energy.

We all agree that there must be a mix of technologies to meet Scotland’s energy needs and climate change commitments. However, the Scottish Conservatives are keen to see an evidence-based approach to the mix of renewables across Scotland. It is clear from the ORE Catapult report that the tidal stream industry

brings many benefits, not only to the job market in Scotland but to the wider UK economy.

We support research and development in organisations involved in emerging renewable technologies, particularly tidal, to secure a viable route to market. I am sure that members across the chamber will agree that that needs to be done in a way that respects biodiversity and protects seabirds, marine mammals, fish and the marine environment.

Despite the SNP Government stating that it wishes to support marine and tidal energy, it has still not awarded a £10 million prize for innovation that was set up a decade ago.

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): On the point about the Saltire prize, does the member accept that the withdrawal of the 100MW allocation for guaranteed CFD pot money for the marine energy sector has been one of the key factors in why no technology has managed to achieve commercial scale as yet in order to satisfy the conditions of the Saltire prize?

Alexander Burnett: Since 2010, the UK Government has allocated more than £90 million grant funding to wave and tidal stream technology, so I will not take lessons suggesting that we have not been supporting the industry.

I return to the Saltire prize. In 2008, the former First Minister Alex Salmond launched the prize in a bid to drive marine energy to generate enough electrical output commercially for at least two years in Scottish waters. However, to this day, the award has not been handed out and there is no light at the end of the tunnel. The prize has been unable to attract a sufficient number of candidates, despite Nicola Sturgeon's insistence on redrawing the criteria to address that issue. In the meantime, two major competitors have gone bust. The scheme remains under review, with experts, civil servants and the industry in disagreement about a relaunch and its cost.

Given that members of the expert committee overseeing the challenge have had to ask for an up-to-date analysis of the marine energy industry to inform their deliberations, it is unclear why Nicola Sturgeon is not willing to find an outcome that benefits the sector, rather than leaving it in limbo. My fellow member Liam McArthur has spoken about that before and we join him in his calls for the Scottish National Party Government to either drop the prize or finally deliver for renewables.

The Scottish Conservatives remain committed to low carbon and the mix of renewables, but we want an evidence-based approach that does not hinder any area of development. We will continue

to work with members across the chamber to ensure a greener energy system. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Are we all quiet now?

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Yes, Presiding Officer.

13:01

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I thank Liam McArthur for bringing the motion to Parliament today and further raising the profile of tidal and wave energy and its benefits for our environment, local economies and the wider national economy.

I will start by looking at the importance of renewables to our future. Renewables are absolutely vital to our drastically reducing our carbon footprint. As we move away from using fossil fuels, tidal and wave energy are key to fulfilling and maintaining our nation's energy requirements. If we do not properly utilise our renewables sector, we will be simply unable to sustain the energy usage that we currently enjoy.

Furthermore, in order for us to remain world leaders in the sector, we must continue to invest in research and development relating to wave and tidal energy and the construction of wave and tidal power stations. The Scottish Government has an outstanding record in delivering investment through Wave Energy Scotland, which it requested be formed in 2014, for the development of wave energy technology in Scotland.

While we in Scotland are investing, conversely, the UK Government is more focused on nuclear energy and is back-tracking on investments that it promised in the tidal energy field. The UK Government has rejected plans for the Swansea tidal lagoon, which would have been the world's first tidal lagoon power station if it had gone ahead and would have propelled the UK to the top of the league as a world leader in the industry. We cannot leave it to the UK Government to take Scotland forward in the tidal stream and wave energy industries.

I will now move on to look at the economic impacts of investing in those renewables. According to a report by ORE Catapult, wave energy could contribute £4 billion to the UK economy and 8,100 jobs by 2040, and tidal energy could contribute £1.4 billion and 22,600 jobs. A cumulative total of £5.4 billion and 30,700 jobs could be brought into the UK, particularly Scotland, Wales and the south-west of England, while preserving our environment and ensuring that we become a world leader. Scotland alone has 25 per cent of all Europe's tidal resources. If enough research and development was

conducted, we could become a major world player in exporting green, clean energy and valuable technology to a global market.

Burntisland Fabrications—or BiFab, as it is better known—which is based in my constituency, built the Oyster wave energy converter, which is better known as the Oyster 800 tidal device. That device is located in the European Marine Energy Centre in the Orkney Islands. EMEC is the first and only centre of its kind in the world to provide developers of wave and tidal energy converters with a purpose-built, accredited, open-sea testing facility.

EMEC is a not-for-profit company. To date, around £34 million of public funding has been invested in EMEC by the Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Carbon Trust, the UK Government, Scottish Enterprise, the European Union and Orkney Islands Council. That investment has ensured that Scotland retains a leading role in the development of marine energy, with 84 contracts awarded, involving more than 177 separate organisations across 13 countries.

I again thank Liam McArthur for securing this worthy debate. I hope that the tidal and wave energy industries continue to go from strength to strength, as they have an important part to play in the renewables sector and in meeting our target of 100 per cent of all electricity generation coming from renewables.

13:05

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Liam McArthur on securing another debate on marine energy. His persistence is to his credit—and much the same could be said for many of those involved in the sector itself.

Such persistence and optimism are well founded. They are based on the far-sighted decision back in 2003 to establish the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney, with backing not just from Europe but from ministers both here and at Westminster, from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and from Orkney Islands Council, as we have heard.

EMEC did not so much address a market failure as represent a market intervention. It sought to stimulate a potential new energy industry in which Orkney, Scotland and the UK could aim to achieve first-mover advantage. Up to a point, that has proved to be the case. As Scottish Renewables points out in its briefing this week, more wave and tidal devices have been developed in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland than in the rest of the world put together. EMEC should take a lot of credit for that enterprising approach.

However, it is only right to acknowledge that the past 15 years have seen ups and downs for marine energy. There have been false dawns and disappointments as well as exciting innovations and technological breakthroughs. Perhaps premature talk of a marine energy boom a decade ago did the sector no real favours, but the hard work has gone on nonetheless.

Alexander Burnett mentioned Vattenfall. Just as marine energy innovation was getting under way in Orkney, a parallel development was taking place in the north-east. The Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group got up and running in 2002 and soon identified having an offshore wind farm in Aberdeen Bay as one of its central ambitions. That seemed just as challenging at the time as achieving commercial viability for wave or tidal energy in Scotland's islands.

After 15 years of hard work and ups and downs, it was great to see many veterans of AREG sail out of Aberdeen aboard a NorthLink ferry for the official opening of the Aberdeen Bay wind farm by Magnus Hall—the chief executive of Vattenfall—and the First Minister. That event proved that a vision for offshore renewable energy can be delivered if the commitment is there and the right commercial developer comes forward to invest in the right project at the right time.

Aberdeen Bay now boasts the world's biggest wind turbines. Like EMEC, the project has benefited from support, both financial and otherwise, from local and national Government and from Europe. Where Orkney boasts the European Marine Energy Centre, Aberdeen is now home to the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre; in addition, innovative new technologies are being pioneered off the coasts of both Buchan and Kincardineshire.

The very success of offshore wind is of course part of the challenge for wave and tidal energy. Wind developers have halved the costs of building and installing turbines in recent years. That means that, in spite of the good work that has already been done to drive down the costs of wave and tidal energy, they have become relatively less competitive in the short term.

However, Scottish Renewables also points out that an ancillary benefit of offshore wind deployment is reduced capital cost for the wave and tidal energy sector, and it is precisely access to capital that is needed now for tidal energy in particular to move on to the next phase. Liam McArthur talked about support from the UK Government in the context of the need to recognise that the technologies are not yet commercially mature. That is absolutely right, but tidal turbines are in the water, producing power. Wave energy has lost some momentum in the

past couple of years, but with the right progress on technology it can move forward, too.

Like offshore wind in Aberdeen Bay, marine energy in Orkney and across Scotland has huge potential. With continuing persistence and backing from investors and Government at every level, it can deliver another step change for renewable energy. If it does so, we will be able to celebrate even more progress the next time we have such a debate.

13:09

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank Liam McArthur for bringing the debate to the chamber and for being one of the Parliament's key champions of renewable energy. I first met him at a marine energy conference more than a decade ago, as I was heading out of the Parliament and he was getting his feet under the table for the first time. During the past decade, we have witnessed many ups and downs in the sector. Orcadian images of sea snakes and oysters and all manner of subsea turbines have graced our television news programmes, but the routes to market and full commercialisation have often been plagued with financial risk and uncertainty, caused largely by subsidy regimes that have failed to support our future energy needs.

The opportunity remains. Scotland still has one quarter of Europe's tidal resource and a 10th of its wave resource. That resource is not going anywhere; as ever, the real prize is to fuse the academic and industry expertise with great test beds and a pipeline of finance to take projects from small-scale arrays right through to fully commercialised technology. The sector has struggled to get to commercialisation because of a circular problem: small projects struggle to attract finance because of high fixed costs, yet those small projects are the very ones that are needed to build confidence to secure financial support for the larger commercially viable projects.

The story and the solutions are familiar. When the Bugar Hill test wind turbines were spinning in Orkney in the 1980s, the Danish Government stuck the best part of £1 billion into the onshore wind sector and sucked most of the expertise into Denmark, where the turbine manufacturers could also sell their kit. Denmark was open for business while the UK was shut. Of course, it was not always like that with our industrial strategy. We used to be proud of our companies, and we were not afraid to put the best part of £1 billion into Rolls-Royce in the 1970s, a move that enabled the company to develop engines that went on to provide the backbone of a £7.4 billion global business.

Private investors need leadership from Government and certainty that policy will not change from year to year. The demise of the renewables obligation has been largely disastrous. Marine energy is unfairly being asked to compete with offshore wind technology, which is 20 years ahead and which has had time to evolve and deliver substantial cost reduction. Our renewable energy technologies should not be forced to compete with one another through contracts for difference, because we need an energy mix that can develop over time, bringing in technologies that complement one another and which harvest different sources of renewable energy. That is why the Westminster Government must bring in a ring-fenced CFD for marine. It is important to back winners and proven, cost-effective technology, but we should not give up on an entire source of energy that is sitting there untapped in our oceans.

The prize is great. The BVG Associates study for ORE Catapult shows that 8,100 direct new jobs could be grown, from our industrial heartlands in Fife right the way to the northern isles. Our great academic institutions, such as the University of St Andrews and Heriot-Watt University, are playing a role and could play a greater one in driving the research that can make the industry cost effective and environmentally benign.

However, those prizes will not be won simply with the dead hand of the market at the tiller. We need the leadership of a UK Government that is prepared to work hand in hand with the Scottish Government and industry—albeit sadly without the financial support of European Union structural funds. The economic prize is great and the imperative of climate change and energy security is unavoidable. We must deliver the opportunity of a vibrant marine energy sector in Scotland.

13:13

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests.

I congratulate my fellow Orcadian Liam McArthur on securing today's members' business debate on a subject that is of such importance to our islands and to my wider Highlands and Islands region. We have heard a number of interesting and thoughtful contributions, and members have given details of projects that are taking place in the waters off the northern isles.

Earlier this week, I had the pleasure of sitting on a panel in Stromness at Orkney Renewable Energy Forum's event, alongside Liam McArthur and Robert Leslie, who was representing the Scottish National Party but who also works for THAW Orkney and Orkney Housing Association. What became clear at the event was not just the

opportunities that present themselves on the islands, but the enthusiasm of local people and organisations and the good work of bodies such as EMEC. That was highlighted by the calls from some people for energy and renewables tourism as a potential way of dealing with the interest in renewables from the islands and further afield.

It is no secret that some sectors of the Highlands and Islands economy have waxed and waned in recent decades, but we can look at the current success of our growing renewable energy industry with pride and with hope for the future. The projects that we are speaking about have the potential to be the industrial successes of the future, which will provide clean and renewable energy to support our economy.

It is particularly welcome that the UK industrial strategy identified “clean growth” as one of our national priorities. That was expanded on recently in the UK Government’s, “The Clean Growth Strategy: Leading the way to a low carbon future”. Clean and sustainable economic growth will be of increasing international importance as countries around the world look to address their international commitments on climate change and decarbonisation. Scotland having a leading role in the development of emergent technologies can have benefits around the world, while securing our domestic energy supply at home.

We can consider the global context, but a much more local dimension is keenly felt in communities such as those in the northern isles. An area of continuing concern is how renewables benefit local supply chains and provide a long-term basis for training and skills development in the communities in which they are deployed. Many members will have heard complaints about the need to import materials and expertise for the wind energy sector. New technologies are an opportunity to get things right—that point follows on from what Mark Ruskell said. There are obvious benefits to be secured through not just the immediate creation of jobs but the building of a local labour market that is skilled in technology-based professions.

There are also, undoubtedly, local challenges to be overcome. In Scotland, the challenges are primarily geographical. Transmission remains an issue—and one that is felt most keenly on the islands, for quite apparent reasons. The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets is currently examining the needs case for a new Orkney interconnector, which has the potential to provide an enormous boost to the industry locally.

Overcoming such barriers to success is, rightly, an area in which Governments should co-operate. The ability of the UK and Scottish Governments—as well as local authorities—to work together will be vital if we are to make progress.

It is positive to reflect on some of the energy sector’s achievements. In recent years, there has been a considerable drop in the cost of a number of renewables technologies as they have moved from being emergent to being established. As a result, clean energy can compete on price, thereby lowering costs for businesses and individuals.

The motion mentions some UK-level policy decisions around tidal energy. I understand that interests in Orkney have a good level of interaction with UK Government ministers in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Scotland Office—indeed, I think that ministers from both departments recently visited Orkney.

There has been recent progress on island onshore wind and there is a renewed focus on new offshore wind, as part of the industrial strategy.

In many cases, renewables technologies are demonstrating the sort of innovation that we want to see across industry. Such innovation should be encouraged and supported. Here in Scotland, we have a range of pioneering examples of projects with a record of development, collaboration and delivery, all done while providing benefits to their communities and the wider economy.

Those attributes will undoubtedly be key to building up Scotland as a global centre for renewables in the years to come. My region, the Highlands and Islands, and my home county of Orkney, in particular, continue to play a leading role in developing and making the renewables of the future.

13:18

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): As other members have done, I thank Liam McArthur for securing the debate, and I thank members for their speeches, this lunch time.

I share Liam McArthur’s view that our sending a strong decisive message to UK ministers—and, indeed, to the sector—to show our support for the sector is a welcome outcome of today’s debate. There is, of course, a long history of support for marine energy in the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government has a strong track record of supporting the sector, as David Torrance said. Support from elsewhere has, perhaps, not been so robust.

We are a maritime nation, and much of Scotland’s influence on the world is built on our scientific and engineering heritage. One of the ways in which that legacy continues is through our approach to the technologies that will power this century and beyond.

As members said, Scotland is home to the world's leading wave and tidal test centre, the European Marine Energy Centre, in Mr McArthur's beautiful constituency. More devices are being tested there than are being tested anywhere else in the world, as Lewis Macdonald rightly said.

Scotland is home, too, to the world's largest tidal stream array: the MeyGen array in the Pentland Firth, which might expand to close to 400MW—scale being a key issue, to which I will turn later. To date, the Scottish Government has invested £23 million in the project in order to get it to its current stage.

Scotland is also home to the world's most powerful 2MW tidal stream turbine, which is Scotrenewables's SR2000 device. As Liam McArthur said, it is a source of pride. It has generated 3 gigawatt hours of energy so far, and the world's largest wave energy technology programme organisation, Wave Energy Scotland, has to date invested £30 million of public support and funded 84 projects involving 177 organisations.

Those are all great successes. Those achievements, and others, can be attributed in no small part to the consistent and committed support of the Scottish Government and our enterprise agencies but, most of all, they can be attributed to the passion, expertise, investment and innovation of this young industry, which we all believe has such huge potential domestically and in export markets.

Despite those successes and the clear potential of the marine energy industry to generate economic growth, the path to commercialisation remains a key challenge. The challenge of building a large-scale home-grown success story has—needlessly, in my view—been made more difficult by the UK Government's decision to remove a ring-fenced subsidy for marine energy. The former Prime Minister David Cameron promised a ring-fenced 100MW-worth of contract for difference funding for marine energy. Unfortunately, that promise was reneged on when Theresa May's Government came in; the offer was removed in December 2016.

We know that the UK—Scotland, in particular—has world-leading strengths in wave and tidal energy. Liam McArthur encapsulated that well when he described the academic base, the natural resource and the supply chain that we already have. There are hundreds of jobs in the Orkney islands that depend on the R and D activity in marine energy.

We know that there is global demand for such technologies. There are opportunities in small island states in areas such as the Indonesian archipelago and the Philippines, where wave and

tidal technology would be an ideal way to deliver sustainable energy for island communities. There are also such opportunities at home in our islands.

As ORE Catapult has demonstrated clearly—David Torrance and others mentioned this—there is great potential for cost reduction. Scale is critical. Lewis Macdonald mentioned offshore wind. He was right in what he said—the capital cost of investment in offshore wind has halved, and the levelised cost has come down substantially. That has been achieved through manufacturing economies of scale, use of increasingly large turbines and an increase in manufacturing volumes, as we have seen with solar energy and onshore wind. We need to encourage commercial-scale projects in wave and tidal energy.

As David Torrance and others said, we are talking about the creation of a significant number of jobs by 2040. ORE Catapult has estimated that 8,100 jobs could be created in the wave energy sector by 2040 and that 4,000 could be generated in the tidal stream sector by 2030, but what the sector needs now is a route to market, in order to enable commercial-scale projects, such as the later phases of MeyGen, to be built out.

As the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy was unwilling to do so, I have convened senior stakeholders from across the wave and tidal sectors, as well as the relevant Scottish, UK and European trade associations, to consider the issue. The key aim of the Scottish Government's marine energy industry working group, which is referenced in Liam McArthur's motion, is to ensure that the sector speaks with one voice and presents a consistent message about its impressive achievements to date, its value to the energy system, the environment and the economy, and the support that it needs to achieve its full potential.

The working group is now halfway through its programme of meetings, but I make it clear that we would be happy to keep the group going beyond its scheduled duration. The group has discussed recent developments and concerns across the sector, and has had a particular focus on finance issues. It has considered the important parallels that Lewis Macdonald mentioned between how, in our offshore wind sector and in our oil and gas sector, the supply chain operates. It has also looked at the work that is under way to develop the revenue support case and the cost-reduction pathway that Mr McArthur calls for in his motion.

Liam McArthur: I should probably declare my interests as someone who is in receipt of feed-in tariffs and renewable heat incentive support.

In relation to the financial support that the minister mentioned, I know that he shares the view that an innovation pot might be a route forward. Has he had any discussions with UK ministers about that proposal?

Paul Wheelhouse: We are certainly keen to support innovation. We are already funding a number of projects, either through Wave Energy Scotland or—as in the case of MeyGen—directly. We are also providing support for other important companies; for example, Nova Innovation, which has developed the Bluemull Sound array. We will continue to engage with the industry, and the issue will be discussed by the working group as we consider how we can support the industry. We are restricted in our ability to support generation of power directly, but Liam McArthur is quite right that technological innovation is one of the areas in which the Scottish Government can provide support. Through the low-carbon innovation fund and other routes, we can look for integrated projects and see whether we can make more use of the Government's leverage on R and D to support the sector.

I look forward to working with the working group in the coming months, given the very useful dialogue that we have had to date.

If I may, Presiding Officer, I would like to respond to some comments that were made in the excellent debate that we have had today, and certainly to the points that Mr Burnett made early on. I take his point about the Saltire prize. We were all disappointed that that has not yet been awarded, but I ask him to reflect on the fact that withdrawal of the 100MW of CFD minima has had a key role to play in preventing projects from reaching commercial scale and therefore capitalising through the Saltire prize. I hope that we all share the aspiration on the prize.

Lewis Macdonald referenced the ups and downs of the industry. He was quite right to say that there have been a number of them. Clearly, with any new technology there is a “valley of death” phenomenon. If I may mix my metaphors, I say that we need to see light at the end of the tunnel and we need an opportunity for commercial-scale development, so that having gone through the early-stage pre-commercial phase, technologists will be able to see that there is a commercial route for them, which is lacking at the moment. We can learn a lot from the development of offshore wind power.

As Mark Ruskell said, unfortunately Scottish ministers no longer have access to ROCs—renewable obligation certificates. That is a matter of great regret, and we continue to press the UK Government to recognise the innovative nature of the technologies that are referenced in such certificates, and to provide them with support.

As far as time is concerned, I have overstayed my welcome. If it will be acceptable to you, Presiding Officer, I will move towards concluding by drawing members' attention to the number of references in the energy strategy to the deployment of marine energy. In closing, I will say that we have made many achievements in Scotland's pioneering wave and tidal sectors. If I may do so briefly, Presiding Officer, I would like to mention a few developments that are relevant to the discussion that we have had.

First, the EU-funded NeSSIE programme—which has nothing to do with the monster in Loch Ness but everything to do with the North Sea solutions for innovation in corrosion for energy project—recently completed a call for applications. Three companies were successful: SIMEC Atlantis Energy, EMEC and SSE. NeSSIE aims to produce business cases for demonstration projects in the North Sea and a detailed value chain for energy corrosion across the partners. Again, that would look at life-cycle costs and at keeping costs down.

Scottish Enterprise has now approved funding for Scottish partners in the last of six transnational projects selected by ocean energy ERA-NET cofund—the official reporters need not worry; I will pass my notes to them. The total SE grant for the six projects is £2.8 million. The total R and D spend, including by companies and other funding organisations, for the projects will be about €15 million, and they will start in the course of this month.

Finally, I am delighted that Edinburgh is hosting Ocean Energy Europe's sixth conference on 30 and 31 October. Having addressed the fifth conference in Nantes, I know that it is a prestigious and growing international event that reflects the strong international interest in the sector. It is therefore an excellent opportunity to showcase Scotland's marine energy strengths, ambition and appetite for collaborating with our international partners. I look forward to welcoming delegates to Edinburgh, and I ask all members here to support the promotion of Scotland's marine achievements in the course of the two-day event. To any UK ministers who may be watching, I say that the conference would be a great opportunity to announce stronger support for what is potentially a hugely significant sector—not just for Scotland, but for the world.

13:28

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

NHS Tayside Board

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The next item of business is a statement by Jeane Freeman on NHS Tayside Board. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so if any members wish to ask a question, they should press their request-to-speak button as soon as possible.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I would like to update the Parliament on developments in the governance of NHS Tayside since the changes to its leadership earlier this year.

In April this year, following clear concerns over the board's service delivery and management of resources, including the board's use of endowment funds, John Brown and Malcolm Wright were appointed as chair and chief executive of NHS Tayside. Malcolm Wright and John Brown are two of the most senior and experienced leaders in the national health service in Scotland. Their immediate remit was to strengthen the governance and leadership of the board and to improve public and stakeholder confidence.

Their first step was to meet with directors, non-executives and clinical leaders to clearly set out their joint and shared aims for improvement and to listen and respond to concerns about the challenges facing the board and how each could contribute to addressing those and taking the board forward. The principles that they set out on that first day—of visible leadership, openness and honesty combined with challenge and accountability—have continued to define the priorities pursued over the last five months.

The top priorities for the new leadership team have been to get a full picture of the situation that they were dealing with right across the whole organisation, to identify the priority areas requiring immediate action and to make best use of the assets and resources at their disposal to remedy those.

In doing so, they have recognised the enormous contribution that the staff of NHS Tayside make each and every day. The approach of the chair and chief executive has been underpinned by a belief that deep-seated cultural and structural matters need to be addressed if delivering reform in the board is to be both effective and sustainable. That is not just about what people do; it is also about how they do it.

The chair and chief executive reviewed all the findings of external reviews and reports carried out

over the previous 18 months and identified five priority areas for focused action: providing clearer direction; supporting operational leadership; driving service change; improving financial and service performance; and ensuring effective regulation and compliance.

An important action by the chair of NHS Tayside has been to commission an independent governance review, covering the role of the board, the role of board members, the capability and capacity of board members to deliver against that role and the effectiveness of the information systems and administrative arrangements necessary to support the board.

Given its importance to the NHS, an independent review of information governance and cybersecurity arrangements has also been completed, and the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors has reviewed the effectiveness of audit arrangements in Tayside.

The chief executive has taken decisive action to strengthen his executive leadership team in key areas, including finance and human resources, as well as rolling out a system that supports staff to make decisions at the most appropriate level. That work has been complemented by the development of a comprehensive performance management system in order to make performance visible and the lines of accountability clear. Oversight of that work is the responsibility of the performance and resources committee, which was introduced to put scrutiny of performance and finance in the same arena.

A new, clinically led operational management system has been put in place that puts clinical leaders in the driving seat, with devolved budget responsibility. Crucially, that is accompanied by a development programme to ensure that they are supported in fulfilling the new roles. The clinical leaders are supported by dedicated operational managers, which is an approach that creates a collective responsibility for improving patient care.

The establishment of a clinical alliance group has also provided a forum to encourage whole-system approaches and the design of innovative solutions that tackle both immediate challenges and longer-term reform.

The newly appointed strategic director of workforce has set in train a safe, affordable workforce process, with the devolution of workforce changes to a local level.

On prescribing, which was highlighted in Sir Lewis Ritchie's report as the other key cost driver in Tayside, a continued and unwavering focus on driving out unwarranted variation and waste is being complemented by a public health-led approach that is aimed at addressing the systemic

factors that drive prescribing behaviours and expectations.

All of that is necessary to deliver the kind of sustainable reform that is envisaged by our chief medical officer in her realistic medicine programme.

Partnership working is being promoted at every level within the organisation, which brings us back to the point that I started with—the importance of openness, honesty and engagement from the internal infrastructure of partnership working to the strengthening of engagement with external stakeholders, including many colleagues who are in the chamber today.

The new leadership team has been at the forefront of the board's response to important issues that have emerged over the past few months, including the recently commissioned independent inquiry into mental health services across the board area.

On the management of endowment funds, we have already taken action to further strengthen the governance around the issue to mitigate any risk that is posed by dual membership. Once the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator has completed its independent inquiry into the management of endowment funds in Tayside, the chair and chief executive will also lead on any further action that may be required.

The work of the chair in engaging with non-executive directors has led some to choose to stand down as the new leadership team has become embedded, having helped to support the transition to the new arrangements.

I was advised on Wednesday 12 September that three non-executives had intimated their wish to resign from their positions. Both Mr Cross and Mr Hay initially considered resigning in April of this year, when action was taken to change the leadership of NHS Tayside, but following discussion with the acting chair, both decided to remain to assist the new chair and chief executive and to help to provide continuity and assist with the review of governance for NHS Tayside. Both have now decided that this is the right time to resign from their roles so that fresh non-executive input can be brought on to the board. I am genuinely grateful to them for their commitment and the positive role that they have played in providing stability to the board in recent months.

A further non-executive, Mr Hussain, has indicated that he will resign following his current period of sick leave. He wrote to me on 31 August—I received the letter on 3 September—on a number of matters, which I immediately followed up on, and I have been assured by the chair that the matters that Mr Hussain raised are being properly dealt with.

I am aware that other board members are also considering their future plans in the light of the significant work that has been undertaken around the governance of the board and the clarity that it has provided on the role of board members in providing challenge and scrutiny and in taking responsibility for doing that.

The board will consider a full report on its governance mechanisms at its meeting on 25 October. I am in regular contact with John Brown—I met him this week—and I have received an assurance that the board's work will continue to meet its responsibilities. He has also confirmed that Trudy McLeay, one of the recent non-executive appointments to NHS Tayside, has agreed to be the board's new whistleblowing champion. I have passed on my thanks to her for taking on that important role.

I expect new non-executive appointments to be made early in the new year following a full values-based appointments process regulated by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life for Scotland.

I will continue to support the new leadership in NHS Tayside building for the future. In addition to agreeing to suspend the repayment of brokerage for three years, I have agreed to provide additional funding, including support to give clinicians the time to make the commitment to clinically led change a reality. I am clear that the need for organisation-wide culture change and sustainable recovery in NHS Tayside will require sustained and agile intervention and leadership of the highest calibre.

I put on the record my thanks to John Brown and Malcolm Wright for their effective and focused work so far, and to the staff of NHS Tayside, who have engaged with and supported the approach and the work that is necessary to ensure the good and effective governance that is essential to the delivery of quality, safe healthcare.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

I send the message to our NHS staff in Tayside that we value them and the work that they do. I know from many emails, phone calls, letters and conversations that I have had with friends of mine who work for NHS Tayside just how low staff morale has fallen in the organisation in recent months and years. That does nothing for staffing and patient care.

We heard that Mr Hussain has written to the cabinet secretary to identify a number of matters,

which she said that she felt the need to immediately follow up. What are those matters?

Given the now imperative need to recruit a long-term leadership team for NHS Tayside, and given the crisis in leadership that we have seen over many years now, does the cabinet secretary agree that the Parliament's Health and Sport Committee should be given an additional scrutiny role for future appointments?

Jeane Freeman: I thank Mr Briggs for the support that he has offered to NHS Tayside staff.

The matters that Mr Hussain raised with me covered doctors in training, prescribing, senior management pay, the use of public funds, child and adolescent mental health services, and transformation. All those matters have been followed up. I will write to Mr Hussain with my responses to all of them, but they are all being followed up by the board. For example, the chief executive of NHS Tayside discussed with our chief medical officer and our chief pharmacist the dosage issue that Mr Hussain raised, and Health Improvement Scotland is conducting a fact-finding review. That will be followed up by a more wide-ranging review by the Royal College of Physicians in London, which NHS Tayside commissioned.

On the scrutiny role that Miles Briggs asked for, the values-based recruitment process that we now undertake very successfully in some of our boards, which is being rolled out for the current round of chief executive appointments, provides significant scrutiny and challenge. At the end of that process, there are, of course, other steps that have to be gone through to ensure that the person is fit to be the accountable officer before any recommendation comes to me. A comparable process is gone through for the chair. That approach is right for our board appointments at that senior leadership level.

I would be very happy to keep the Health and Sport Committee apprised of how we are progressing on that matter, but we have an appropriate and robust level of scrutiny, challenge and checks within our current arrangements to ensure that we secure the best possible senior leadership for our health service in Scotland, particularly through that values-based recruitment process.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of her statement.

There is a crisis in public confidence in NHS Tayside following a series of issues, which include financial mismanagement leading to brokerage loans; the raiding of the charity endowment fund; a chief executive and a chair being forced to resign; the issues at Carseview leading to an independent mental health inquiry; and the failure to suspend a consultant after repeated concerns were raised.

The cabinet secretary made passing reference to the now former whistleblowing champion Munwar Hussain. I have seen the letter that Mr Hussain sent to the cabinet secretary, in which he said:

"On the 27th June 2018 I received a direct email from an ex-doctor in training who had managed to get my e-mail address. Noting that"

they

"had left the NHS due to issues of systematic bullying and negative cliques and highlighting this issue for others within the organisation.

Further, there were claims that people were raising issues, but these were not being acted upon by managers. Including allegations in the email that a previous trainee took their own life and the stress was unbearable for some."

That is a serious set of allegations, which includes the claim that a trainee took their own life due to stress.

Mr Hussain went on to say that he had asked for that to be raised at a board meeting, but was told that he could not do so. He twice attempted to meet the strategic director of workforce in August but, both times, the meetings were cancelled. Eventually, he raised the matter at a staff governance committee meeting, but he

"felt that this was viewed as an on-going issue that is tolerated".

Why does the cabinet secretary feel reassured that the matter is being dealt with adequately, when the person whose job it was to ensure that it was dealt with adequately did not believe that it was—so much so that he resigned?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Mr Sarwar for that supplementary additional question. There are undoubtedly challenges for NHS Tayside, which I would not underestimate in any respect. There are challenges across our health service; we have heard about some of them in the chamber before and undoubtedly we will rehearse some of them again. I take all concerns that are raised with me, directly or by any other means, very seriously indeed.

In the specific instance, which Mr Sarwar has quoted, of the junior doctor—the ex-doctor in training—raising those issues, the appropriate place for the whistleblowing champion to raise the matters is, indeed, in the staff governance committee and not in the wider public board meeting. That was why it was not appropriate to raise the issue and talk about individuals in those circumstances in that public forum.

The General Medical Council report on the quality of junior doctor training in mental health services will be at the next NHS Tayside staff governance committee and the specific allegations

that were reported via that whistleblowing are currently under investigation. The chamber should rest assured—I give members my absolute assurance—that I will continue to monitor how those matters progress. That is on the basis of the board responding appropriately, in my opinion, to the whistleblowing issues that have been raised with it. I have the assurance that those issues are being dealt with, and I will continue to monitor how the board deals with them and what the end results will be. I am happy to continue to advise my colleagues across the chamber of progress as it is made.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement and I put on record my thanks to NHS Tayside staff for all that they do.

In its report on NHS governance, the Parliament's Health and Sport Committee recommended that there should be staff involvement in the process of appointing whistleblowing champions for boards. The cabinet secretary's response to the report mentions a consultation on new whistleblowing standards. How will those standards address the situation in which the NHS Tayside whistleblowing champion found himself, with concerns being escalated but not clearly acted upon, and how will they set out standards for staff involvement?

The cabinet secretary noted that legislation would be introduced in the autumn to establish an independent national whistleblowing officer for NHS Scotland, to go live by the end of September 2019. Is that still on track? Is that timeframe acceptable, and what can be done to expedite further support for whistleblowers now?

Jeane Freeman: I thank Ms Johnstone for her questions and for her support for NHS staff on Tayside.

On the involvement of staff, NHS Tayside board has, as other boards have, a partnership forum that directly involves representatives of staff from across the board. Matters that go to the board are discussed in the partnership forum, which is represented through the employee director who sits on the board.

I understand, from the information that members have about Mr Hussain's letter to me—if they have had sight of it, or seen media coverage in the *Sunday Post* last Sunday—that there is a claim that whistleblowing claims were escalated but not clearly acted upon. From the information that I have received from the board about how it is dealing with the matter—part of which I have made available today to Mr Sarwar, and I am perfectly willing to make that available more widely to other members—I do not share the view that those whistleblowing issues have been escalated

but not acted upon. That is precisely what I have sought assurance upon: that not only have the claims been escalated, but they are being acted upon. I believe that I have that assurance, and I have already stated that I will continue to keep a close eye on how those matters progress as the board goes through its proper processes. As I have said, I am very content to keep members up to date with progress as it is made.

On another matter, Ms Johnstone asked whether we are on track—we are on track with the appointment and the timescale.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

As a result of Anas Sarwar's revelations to Parliament, I will depart from my prepared question. On a failure of whistleblowing systems this serious, can we really expect the board to mark its own homework? As such, does the cabinet secretary agree that it is in our national interest to bring these issues into the light, and will she today instruct a full independent public inquiry into whistleblowing practices in north Tayside?

Jeane Freeman: I assume that Mr Cole-Hamilton wants an independent inquiry into the whole of Tayside and not just one bit of it. I do not believe that that is necessary.

On 3 September, very serious claims by a member of NHS Tayside's board were communicated to me by email. On 11 September, having been absent due to ill health, that board member indicated his intention to resign. The board has acted on those concerns. As I have said, I saw the actions that the board took prior to Mr Hussain getting in touch with me. I have made a commitment that I will keep a close eye on how those matters progress, and I will keep the chamber up to date on that.

The board is absolutely not marking its own homework. I understand and share members' concern about this issue, but we need to be very careful about the language that we use. As I have said, NHS Tayside has asked the Royal College of Physicians in London to undertake a review of the dosage issue. The GMC will be involved in terms of the allegation about doctors in training—the single doctor who raised the whistleblowing matter.

On the issue about senior management pay and the public reporting of pay and expenses, a paper will go to the board in October proposing that the board publish not only pay scales but expenses.

Issues relating to CAMHS have been discussed in the chamber many times. Members, the Government and the NHS Tayside board are acting on those issues.

I refute the notion that on matters as serious as this, the board—or indeed any other board—marks its own homework. That is absolutely not the case. As I have said, I will keep members updated, via another statement if that is what members wish, or by other means, on the progress of the specific issues that have been raised, within the wider context of the significant steps that the acting chair and the acting chief executive are taking with senior staff and others in Tayside to improve the scrutiny and governance of the board.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Given the importance of the role of non-executive board members, how can health boards and the Scottish Government ensure that people with the right skills are recruited to those posts?

Jeane Freeman: There are ways in which we go about recruiting to non-executive member posts and to important posts in other public bodies. In the health service, we use what we describe as values-based recruitment. The intention behind that recruitment exercise is that it allows applicants to display more than one dimension of their capability and capacity—in other words, we look at the values that they bring, as well as at their experience of particular tasks.

Non-executive board members are critical to our health service. There are issues in Tayside, but we can see issues more widely elsewhere in the United Kingdom, where absence of effective scrutiny and challenge by non-executive members of boards leads, at the very least, to poor decisions being made. It is important that non-executive board members not only understand the information that they are given and are given the right information to allow them to exercise their function, but that they pursue their challenges.

The recruitment process that we now have in place will offer us the opportunity to have an even more robust view of the individuals who come forward to what is a very responsible role that requires a lot of their time, energy and expertise. That is how we recruit, interview, select and determine for the role of non-executive board members.

One final step that it is important for chairs to take is the annual review of how individual board members are performing in their role, which is robust. This Monday, I will have a further discussion with the chairs of all our boards about how we can ensure that such reviews are consistent across the boards, because they inform future appointments of members both to the health board concerned and to any other board in the health service.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The cabinet secretary said in response to an earlier

question that 27 June was the date when she first received information about the matter—or the Scottish Government did. Was it the previous health secretary who received the information or was it Ms Freeman?

Jeane Freeman: I think that Liz Smith is referring to the point that Mr Sarwar made about Mr Hussain saying that he raised the matter of the board. Mr Hussain's letter to me is dated 31 August—he sent it to me by e-mail on 3 September. That was the first point at which I became aware of the specific concerns that he raised. When he sent me the letter on 3 September, he raised the matters with me and asked for what he described as a period of “special leave” because of his health. There is no such thing as special leave, so he was advised to seek his general practitioner's involvement. He has, since then, been on sick leave, although on 11 September he intimated his intention to resign when his period of sick leave is over.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Members have referred to the Health and Sport Committee's report on the governance of the NHS in Scotland, which highlights among other things the importance of monitoring and assessing whether changes in support for whistleblowers in NHS bodies are effective. I note from the cabinet secretary's response to the report that there is no intention to hold the dignity at work survey in 2018, which is one of the means by which the NHS is able to assess staff's views of the support that is available to them. What else does she have in mind to monitor the views of staff who feel bullied, harassed or under pressure as a consequence of whistleblowing or other issues?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Mr Macdonald for raising that matter and to the committee for its report, which I read in great detail and to which I have responded. I believe that I am due to meet the committee to go through some of the matters in detail, because the report raises an important series of issues and relates to further steps that we might take.

I believe that we have already dealt with the dignity at work survey in the chamber—we discussed the level of response to it. On the iMatter survey, the response rate for NHS Tayside staff compares well with the rate for the health service across the piece: there was a 63 to 65 per cent response rate, or engagement rate, from them.

In respect of the overall grid showing how people viewed their position, NHS Tayside is at the top level in some areas, but it needs to improve in others. The staff governance committee and the partnership forum in NHS Tayside should be actively looking to make

improvements, in particular in the area that Mr Macdonald raised.

As members will know, each board is subject to an annual ministerial review of its performance. This year, I personally will conduct NHS Tayside's review, and that is one of the areas in which I will be looking to see what progress it has made and how that has been received by staff when I meet the clinical forum and the partnership forum.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I have not had sight of emails that Anas Sarwar or anyone else received, but I note the mention of openness, honesty and whistleblowing in the cabinet secretary's opening statement. We have covered dignity at work and other areas in the Health and Sport Committee. Can the cabinet secretary expand on exactly what will happen regarding whistleblowing, honesty and openness to ensure that it really is safe and acceptable for staff to speak out—especially in confidence—about matters that they think should be highlighted?

Jeane Freeman: As I indicated in my statement, there is a new whistleblowing champion at board level in NHS Tayside. We have already covered the other initiatives that are being taken around national whistleblowing.

However, I record that in relation to NHS Tayside, what I said in my statement stands and deserves repetition—we are looking to secure significant cultural and structural reform in NHS Tayside. Such cultural reform is critical in all boards, so I will be looking at them all to ensure that they are behaving in a manner that I believe is appropriate in relation to how they engage with staff, how they involve staff, and how welcoming they make it for staff at any level in any part of a health board's operation to raise concerns and to have confidence that those concerns will be listened to seriously and acted on, and that they will be advised about what has happened as a result.

In some instances, concerns will be raised that prove to be ill founded. They will not have been raised in a malicious way, but when the facts are looked at, it might be seen that there is no particular foundation for concerns. Nonetheless, if a member of staff's view is that something is cause for concern, that should be treated seriously.

All such matters will be looked at. We will look at the other boards to ensure that they are operating in the manner that I believe is essential for them actively and fully to make best use of their most significant resource—our staff who work in the health service. Every single one of the ministerial reviews of boards for this year that will be conducted by me and my two ministerial

colleagues will focus on that and on a range of other matters.

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): Last year, it was revealed that NHS Tayside had a severe problem with workplace bullying. Respondents to a questionnaire highlighted that they did not trust their managers enough to tell them about it. The current whistleblower development—we have heard quite a shocking list of concerns today—also involves a lack of trust in management's capability to take things seriously.

The actions that the cabinet secretary has spoken about in relation to NHS boards overall are one thing, but NHS Tayside's actions have not worked out so far for the staff there. What will the cabinet secretary do specifically for NHS Tayside staff, who are very mistrusting of management, to stop the situation from continuing?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Mr Bowman for raising that issue. It is a serious issue when NHS staff—it is serious for staff in any organisation, but my focus is on NHS staff—say that they do not trust their management to take their concerns seriously or that they fear that if they raise concerns, there may be repercussions for doing so. In addition to the steps that I have outlined, when I undertake the ministerial review of NHS Tayside, I will make a particular point of looking at that issue.

For the benefit of Mr Bowman and others, I say that normal practice for these ministerial reviews involves meeting the clinical forum, which is a mix of clinical staff of all grades, to talk about how they feel matters are being pursued within their health board, and meeting the partnership forum, which involves unions and others who represent staff, including the Royal College of Nursing. However, in this particular instance, I will make a point of also seeking a way to have a wider discussion with staff in NHS Tayside on some of these specific matters.

I will do that without the benefit of having NHS board officials beside me—although obviously I will have my officials with me—in order to try to get under the skin and find out what the issue is about so that we can be assured, or take other steps if needed, on how the current leadership of NHS Tayside is addressing the matters and taking them forward.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary give assurances that all staff at NHS Tayside will continue to be kept informed of any developments?

Jeane Freeman: I believe that I can do that, given the knowledge that I have. For example, I know that the current acting chair, John Brown, regularly issues staff notices to keep staff apprised of what is happening. I believe that a notice was

issued either yesterday or the day before with respect to the board resignations, giving staff assurance that the matters that Mr Hussain raised are being dealt with and looked at in detail by the chief executive and the senior team. It also gave assurance to the wider community that, despite the resignations, the board is still able to meet its core statutory responsibilities and its wider responsibilities on integration of health and social care.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): In the cabinet secretary's response to Miles Briggs, she referred to an issue of dosage that is being reviewed. Can she provide details on the conditions to which the dosage review pertains?

In the same response, the cabinet secretary outlined details of the appointment process for the new chief executive. I seek confirmation that the recruitment process has started, because we need a stable and seamless transition in December for the long term.

Can the cabinet secretary give her views on the forecast outturn of an £18.7 million deficit this year in Tayside, which will take Tayside's debt to the Government to nearly £65 million? How does she plan to get on top of that and give patients in Tayside the confidence that this financial mess is being sorted out?

The Presiding Officer: There were a lot of questions there, cabinet secretary, so perhaps do not go into too much detail on all of them. That was too many questions for the end of the statement.

Jeane Freeman: Thank you, Presiding Officer—I will do my best.

On the specific conditions for the dosage review, I do not have that information before me, but I am happy to seek it and I will advise Ms Marra of it in due course.

On the process for recruiting the chief executive, the preliminary process has begun. Even if we had started that in August or earlier, we would have been unlikely to have a chief executive in post in time, because it takes time to go through such matters. Generally speaking, when we are looking for high-quality leaders, they will be leaving another role and we will have to negotiate their leaving period. However, I am pleased that Mr Brown has agreed to continue as the acting chair until the new chief executive is in post, which I hope will be in the early part of 2019. Of course, we will also begin the process of recruiting a permanent chair of NHS Tayside for the four-year period.

On the finances, we engage actively with boards across the financial year on their financial position. I have made it clear to all boards that, in looking to

address their financial challenges, we need to be assured that they are making best use of the resources. However, I have also made it clear that it will not be acceptable for them to take capacity out of their health boards in terms of delivery, because of the direct knock-on impact that that has on patients.

My chief finance officer in the directorate and the health service is actively engaged with NHS Tayside and its board. As members will recall, NHS Tayside is at the highest escalation level for health boards in Scotland, which means that there is detailed and rigorous reporting and scrutiny of all the decisions that the board makes and, in particular, the decisions on finance.

Violence Reduction

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-13995, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on violence reduction in Scotland, progress and future priorities.

15:10

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): It is a pleasure to open my first debate as Minister for Community Safety and to be able to highlight the significant progress that has been made in reducing violence in Scotland and talk about our future priorities in the area.

Over the past decade, recorded violent crime has almost halved, and there has been a parallel fall in the number of emergency admissions to hospital that result from assault. That trend is reflected in the Scottish crime and justice survey. The fact is that violence has been reducing over the past decade.

I pay tribute to all those who have played their part in driving that downward trend, including Labour and Liberal Democrat members, whose parties regarded violence as a national priority during their time in office. Their hard work, which was taken forward by the Scottish National Party, has resulted in people feeling safer in their communities. Fear of crime continues to decrease.

That direction of travel is attracting attention from far and wide. Our approach to reducing violence in Scotland is being advocated by the World Economic Forum and is drawing interest from countries across the world, including Canada, Australia, America, Japan, South Africa, Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania and Estonia, many of which are looking to Scotland for answers.

Earlier this year, Cressida Dick, the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, visited Scotland to learn more about our approach to violence, and yesterday I was pleased to note that the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, announced that the city of London will have its own violence reduction unit, which will be based on the Scottish model, in particular our public health approach. I wish the city authorities well as they adapt the model to meet the particular challenges that they face in London.

Why is there worldwide interest in what Scotland is doing to reduce violence? We have come a long way since 2005, when the United Nations declared Scotland the most violent country in the developed world. In the same year, a World Health Organization study of crime figures in 21 European countries showed that Glasgow was the murder capital of Europe.

More often than not, solutions to violence were sought in the criminal justice system, through increased stop and search and tougher sentencing. In 2016, we increased the maximum penalty for possession of a knife from four years to five years. The average length of custodial sentence imposed for knife crime has almost doubled over the past decade. People who are convicted of a crime of violence in Scottish courts are more likely to receive a custodial sentence than they would have been 10 years ago.

Although those are important interventions to stop violent crime, we knew that we also needed to do something different. Strathclyde Police formed the violence reduction unit, with a focus on Glasgow. Soon after, the unit became Scotland's national centre of expertise. The unit used analysis that showed that Glasgow's most problematically violent areas were also the poorest areas and those with the highest rates of addiction, domestic abuse, teenage pregnancy and suicide.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I am carefully following what the minister is saying and I agree with a great deal of it. Might the current situation in local government, with year-on-year cuts to local services, have an impact on local interventions, reversing some of the good work that has been done?

Ash Denham: The member should agree that we have given local government a very fair settlement. We have also invested substantially in violence prevention programmes. As I will go on to outline, that has paid real dividends in Scotland, to the extent that the approach that we are taking here is being looked at by countries around the world.

Violence was recast as a disease, the symptoms of which I have described. That was the foundation of our public health approach to reducing violence in Scotland, which comes from the understanding that violence is preventable, not inevitable.

Since 2008, we have provided the violence reduction unit with an unprecedented £12 million. It has tackled the root causes of violence, rather than just treating the symptoms. Over the past few years, we have supported a number of other violence reduction programmes, including the mentors in violence prevention programme, which aims to support young people to have discussions about gender-based violence issues. We have provided funding to support organisations such as Medics Against Violence, which targets young people who are at risk of being killed or becoming victims of serious life-changing injuries. Health volunteers are used to deliver education sessions in secondary schools that involve them talking to

young people about the consequences of violence and how to keep themselves safe.

We are also supporting Medics Against Violence to deliver its ask, support, care programme, which aims to give national health service staff, including dentists, as well as vets, hairdressers, beauticians and firefighters, the skills to reach out to people when there are signs of potential domestic abuse.

Since 2009, we have also supported the no knives, better lives programme, which has targeted young people aged between 11 and 18 in addressing the issue of knife carrying. The success of the local partnerships involved, which have taken part in a wide range of diversionary activities that are funded through Scotland's unique cashback for communities programme, is making a real difference. However—credit where credit is due—our young people are now making better choices for their lives, and fewer of them are carrying knives. I was particularly honoured last week to attend a celebration of Police Scotland youth volunteers at the Parliament, to learn about the difference that that initiative is making to young people and their communities.

We have also supported the development of the street and arrow food truck. Its programmes offer people with previous convictions who wish to turn their lives away from the cycle of violence tailored interventions that will support them in achieving that. Yesterday, I met Leeann and Callum, two young people who had recently been supported by the VRU approach. Both of them had been in and out of prison, had addiction issues and had experienced violent and chaotic lifestyles but, through street and arrow's tailored support and intervention, they now have steady jobs for the first time in their lives and are positive, contributing members of their communities. Their lived experience is a powerful demonstration of how a public health approach to justice changes lives for the better.

I am pleased that our recent programme for government includes a package of measures to better support the victims of crime. We are extending the delivery of our navigators programme into two new hospitals—Crosshouse hospital in Ayrshire and the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Glasgow. The programme is a hospital emergency department-based intervention, in which navigators aim to interrupt the cycle of violence. Callum, the young man I mentioned earlier, spoke positively about the programme—he said that, when he was at his lowest point, the navigators reached out to him, which made a huge difference to his life. The expansion of the programme will enable us to reach out to more people with chaotic lifestyles.

I have mentioned just a few of the initiatives that have developed over the years, which are being

driven forward by the efforts of many caring and passionate people. Today, I want to pay tribute to those individuals who make such initiatives what they are and who often give up their own time to help others to turn their lives around.

I am aware that the Liberal Democrats lodged an amendment on the importance of throughcare in our justice system. It was not accepted, but we would have supported it, because if offenders who have committed violent crime are not given the right support, it is likely that they will go back out on to the streets and reoffend. The cabinet secretary and I would be happy to meet Liam McArthur to discuss his ideas further.

We know that the underlying causes of violence are deeply rooted in poverty, inequality, toxic masculinity and Scotland's relationship with alcohol. The introduction of minimum unit pricing is allowing us to take direct action to tackle the provision of high-strength, low-cost alcohol across Scotland. As members may be aware, our alcohol strategy is due to be published in the coming weeks.

However, to effect a further downwards trend, we need to understand violence better. That is why the previous Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Michael Matheson, commissioned a detailed study to improve our understanding of non-sexual violent crime and, in particular, emerging evidence that violence may be becoming more concentrated on repeat victims and within certain communities. The first part of that research will be published next Tuesday and will look into the characteristics of robberies. A report on serious assaults will follow in the spring. We will continue to work with partners to further our knowledge about what works to reduce violence and to understand where our focus needs to be in the future.

The recent focus on Scotland's approach has certainly been welcome. During the past decade, we have provided the leadership and support to turn Scotland's record on violence around. However, we know that there are very real challenges ahead. We must look at new and emerging evidence, understand what works, learn from others where we can, break cycles of violence across all our constituencies, and change our nation for the better.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the World Economic Forum's recent recognition of Scotland's progress in turning its record on violence around; notes that, through a public health approach, police recorded crime, the number of accident and emergency admissions and the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey results, including incidents not reported to police, all indicate a significant reduction in violent crime over the last decade; recognises the role of the Violence Reduction Unit, which was established in 2005, in driving these reductions in partnership with a range of public and third sector partners, and

acknowledges the importance of support for victims and their families who are affected by crime, along with prevention, early intervention and services that support rehabilitation and ultimately reduce reoffending to ensure that violence continues to reduce across Scotland.

15:21

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): When we face great problems in public services, it is common for us to call for a different approach or to say that we must do more. Today's debate is an important one, because the motion rightly acknowledges that, in the area of violent crime, a different approach was taken and significant progress has been made. However, we must not be complacent, and the amendment in my name seeks to guard against that.

It is important to acknowledge that Scotland has turned its record on violence around. No longer are we the most violent country in the developed world, as reported by the UN in 2005. Neither is Glasgow the murder capital of Europe, as reported by the World Health Organization in the same year. At least part of that stems from another event in that year, when, as has been described by Ash Denham, a novel approach to violence was taken by Glasgow's violence reduction unit. It extrapolated from health principles in treating the cause rather than the symptoms of violence, and it treated violent behaviour as a disease that spreads from one person to another. At least to some extent, that appears to have been successful, with the numbers of homicides and facial trauma patients having fallen across the country. Therefore, I am pleased to echo the minister's thanks to the VRU for the work that it does.

I would also like to note the navigator programme, which is currently running in Glasgow and Edinburgh. It places professionals in accident and emergency departments to engage and support patients at what are called "reachable, teachable moments", in order to break the cycle of violence. It is a great initiative and we need to see it expanded—perhaps even beyond what the minister has suggested.

I think that there will also be consensus on the importance of early prevention through education. Again, I echo the minister's reference to the no knives, better lives programme. Last November, I watched the powerful and often harrowing play "Balisong", which was run by that programme. Such theatre, which was created by young people, for young people, drove home to the roughly 12,000 people who saw it the very serious consequences of carrying a knife.

However, that is only part of the picture. We have much further to go in making Scotland safer and tackling all forms of crime. I know that

because, when those in power pat themselves on the back as they quote recorded crime levels as the definitive measure, they fail to recognise the hidden figures and, crucially, the fact that correlation does not necessarily equal causation. In an answer yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice said:

"I hope that everyone will look at the data to see where we have had success"—[*Official Report*, 19 September 2018; c 11.]

However, with respect, that argument is flawed: raw data does not automatically allow a causal link to be made. If we think about that, it stands to reason. As was described in the World Economic Forum report, victims of violence are more likely to go to A and E than to the police. The Scottish crime and justice survey shows that at least two thirds of crime goes unreported. The SNP's own crime-counting rules mean that figures on violent crime do not include, for example, assaults that result in a broken nose or a loss of consciousness. However, I suggest that if we were to ask someone who had been knocked out whether they had been a victim of violent crime, the answer would be a resounding yes.

Ash Denham: I want to reinforce my point. We say that recorded crime is at a 43-year low, but I accept the member's point that not all crime is recorded. However, across the recorded figures, accident and emergency admissions, which the member has just mentioned, and the Scottish crime and justice survey, we see a long-term and sustained decrease in crime. Does the member accept that?

Liam Kerr: No, and I will say why. If we look at the data that is being recorded, we see that large numbers of violent crimes are going unreported, so the data on which the conclusions are based is unreliable. Official statistics offer part of the picture, but for Ash Denham to rely on them exclusively is dangerously complacent and misleading.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: Let me address the point first. Last year's recorded crime publication showed a clear rise in the number of crimes of violence, including homicides, attempted murders, serious assaults and robberies. More recent data from Police Scotland confirms that violent, sexual and drug-fuelled crimes increased by between 7 and 11 per cent last year. The number of crimes involving offensive weapons rose by 10 per cent. Police now deal with more than 161 domestic violence calls a day and, of course, they are just the incidents that they hear about.

Most shamefully of all, the chances of someone who lives in Scotland's most deprived

communities being a victim of crime remain the same as they were 10 years ago. We cannot be complacent about violent crime or, as *Scotland on Sunday* put it, we cannot allow

“a hunger for ‘good news’ ... to blunt our critical faculties.”

James Dornan: Earlier, you talked about the official figures not being the way to do it. You used the example of people going to accident and emergency instead of the police. The minister got up and told you that the accident and emergency figures are going down. You responded by saying, “Aye, but that doesn’t matter.” What is it exactly that you want? Do you want every single incident to be recorded by somebody like Robocop?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: First, Mr Kerr, you are not going to lose time. Secondly, can members remember not to use the “you” word? I am fed up saying it. You say “the member”—I am the “you” person sitting in the chair.

Liam Kerr: I do not disagree. I accept that the number of hospital admissions for trauma are down and I accept that progress is being made. My point is that we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent. That is what I am concerned is happening in the Government.

As a further example, yesterday the Minister for Community Safety stood up and stated:

“The evidence points towards a long-term and sustained reduction in antisocial behaviour”,

only for Jamie Halcro Johnston to adduce Police Scotland management figures that clearly show that, in one year, antisocial behaviour has increased by 25 per cent in parts of his region. The minister was thus forced to concede that

“The 2017-18 report suggests a slight increase overall in antisocial behaviour.”—[*Official Report*, 19 September 2018; c 15, 16.]

It is a 5 per cent increase across 23 local authorities.

Our message, and the reason behind our amendment is clear. We should celebrate the successes but stop ignoring the reality on the ground, stop ignoring what police and experts are saying, and start an honest dialogue with the people of Scotland about the difficult decisions that have to be made to reduce violent crime.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: I really cannot.

On which note, as Niven Rennie makes clear in *Holyrood* magazine today, policing alone will not drive reductions in violence. That is not to say that officers on the ground are not part of the answer, because they are. However, almost every area of Scotland has fewer officers on the front line now

than they had five years ago, and more cuts are on the way.

Strong community policing is essential to prevention and detection. If the SNP is serious about combating violent crime, it will get officers out of backroom roles and on to the front line, where they can make a difference.

We should congratulate the violence reduction unit and build on its successes, but we cannot close our eyes to the fact that violent crime appears to be increasing and the number of local police officers is being cut. The SNP must acknowledge the true level of crime on its watch. It must put victims first by keeping dangerous offenders off our streets. That is what our amendment seeks to reflect, and I commend it to Parliament.

I move amendment S5M-13995.1, to leave out from “, the number” to “partners,” and insert:

“statistics indicate a significant reduction in violent crime over the last decade; recognises the role of the Violence Reduction Unit, which was established in 2005, in driving these reductions in partnership with a range of public and third sector partners; however further notes with concern the recent comments from the Director of the Violence Reduction Unit that violent crime is up to 11 times higher than indicated in these recorded crime statistics; accepts that the latest statistics show that violent crime is now increasing again.”.

15:29

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I will begin by restating some of the facts—I do not apologise for doing so, as they bear repetition.

In 2005, the UN published a report declaring Scotland to be the most violent country in the developed world and, a week later, WHO figures led to Glasgow being named the murder capital of Europe, as other speakers have mentioned. That translated into 70 killings a year. Further, at that time, more than 1,000 people a year required treatment for facial trauma alone, many as a result of violent stabbings and beatings. Indeed, I recall being told by my cousin, who was working as a junior doctor in an accident and emergency department in Glasgow, about the realities that she faced when she was having to learn about knife trauma, and it was harrowing.

In that same year, the violence reduction unit was founded. I do not want to spend too long rehearsing the background of the VRU—I think that the minister did an excellent job of setting out the work that it has done. I welcome the opportunity to debate this topic and to examine and mark the advances that have been made. However, we must also analyse not only the impact of what has been achieved but why it has been possible to achieve that impact. We must look at the methods that have been used and think

about why they have been successful because, above all else, what is important is that we continue to combat violence in our communities and make progress in reducing the number of victims of violent crime.

I believe that there are three principal reasons why the VRU approach has been successful. The first concerns analysis, which involves understanding the factors that drive violence. The second concerns prevention because, once we consider the issue through a public health lens, we can understand that violence breeds violence, that it spreads like an epidemic and that violence is a social disease—in some cases a social norm—and we can start to work out how to treat it. The third concerns cross-agency working, which is vital, because violence is not something that can be tackled by the police alone; it requires Government, social work, employers, courts, prisons, social enterprises, schools and families to all intervene at the appropriate times and places.

Could that approach be copied in other areas, particularly with regard to drugs? Recently, we have spoken at great length about Scotland's drugs problem and about the need to treat it more as a health issue than just as a justice one. Ultimately, however, it is both a justice and a health issue, and perhaps the model that we have adopted in relation to violence reduction, with analysis, prevention and cross-agency working, could be used to tackle Scotland's shameful record on illegal drugs.

The VRU has been wildly successful. The murder rate in Glasgow has fallen by 60 per cent, facial trauma numbers have halved and violent crime is down on 2005 figures by every measure.

I also want to note yesterday's welcome announcement by London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, of a commitment to create a violence reduction unit in London. I understand that a similar public health approach has been taken in the West Midlands.

Labour is happy to support the motion that has been put forward by the Government today. However, we must take the opportunity that the debate gives us not only to focus on progress, which is vital, but to offer a critique, which is also fundamental. As Liam Kerr said, we cannot have an ounce of complacency in our approach to this issue.

Our amendment seeks to make two fundamental points that we hope the Government will acknowledge in the vote this evening, in the spirit of continued consensus and co-operation on this issue.

The first point is that we must recognise that the success of a cross-agency approach is put at risk when the agencies are not fully resourced. The second point is that, although the long-term trend

is clear, the short-term trend is much more worrying.

On resources, the Parliament knows well our criticism of cuts to public services over the past decade under the SNP, and particularly the cuts to local government. Local government is a key partner, and the cuts to local government have been stark. That can only have a negative impact on the ability of the whole system to deliver reductions in violence. However, we must also recognise the great work that the third sector organisations do in this area. They are also experiencing huge difficulties as a result of constraints on their budgets, and we should be mindful of the effect that that could have. People often talk about joined-up thinking, co-ordination and early intervention, but those approaches can happen only if local government and the third sector are properly and adequately resourced.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Does the member welcome the Scottish Government's recent investment in local authorities to address the issue of women offending?

Daniel Johnson: I will congratulate the Scottish Government when it funds local government adequately and stops year-on-year cuts to its resource grant from central Government.

We also know from official statistics that violent crime has seen a long-term decrease, and I acknowledge that. It should be celebrated. However, more recently, Government statistics are also clear that non-sexual violent crime has shown a 14 per cent increase in the past two years. The clear-up rate—the percentage of those crimes being solved—has fallen to 77 per cent. Those are concerning trends and ones that I raise because I am keen that the Government and Parliament do not just pat themselves on the back but understand that there is much more to do and that we need more focus on tackling the issues.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Daniel Johnson: The member may be rising to ask what my position is on the Conservative amendment. It is with regret that I say that we will not be supporting the Conservative amendment because of the inaccuracy within it. However, I agree with much of the sentiment. As the violence reduction unit would say itself, the reality is that only 43 per cent of violent crimes are reported and health admissions as a result of violent acts in our communities are much higher than reported crime. Although those statistics are not necessarily outside international norms, they must be recognised.

On that basis, I understand the sentiments but, because of the inaccuracy, I cannot support the amendment. I believe in a full, frank and honest discussion. I do not believe that we can vote for an inaccurate amendment.

I see that the Presiding Officer is nodding at me, so I will conclude there.

I move amendment S5M-13995.3, to insert at end:

“; notes that the success of the public health approach will be at risk unless public and third sector partners are properly funded; further notes with concern that numbers of non-sexual violent crimes have increased by 14% in the last two years, while the clear-up rate has fallen from 84% to 77%, and encourages the Scottish Government to investigate the reasons for this recent trend, which has seen a stall in the long-term progress in reducing violent crime.”

15:36

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): This is not necessarily the debate that I thought that we would have. The Government motion talks about the:

“recognition of Scotland’s progress in turning its record on violence around”

and we should applaud that. We should express gratitude to the people who have delivered that success.

There is no Green party amendment, because I do not take offence with anything that is in the Government motion. I do not suppose that opposition colleagues do substantially either. Recognising success is not the same as assuming that there is perfection. There certainly is not perfection and we have a way to go.

As someone who is not particularly numerate, I cannot juggle the figures. It has to be seen over the longer term, and it is irrefutable that tremendous progress is being made. We know that. We heard from the Minister for Community Safety that people come here looking for answers. I wish them every success. It is tremendous that Sadiq Khan is to come here. There are too many young men in London whose lives are being lost. If lessons can be learned from Scotland and any life saved, that is real progress.

We had a debate in the chamber recently on the United Nations international day of peace. I quoted Boutros Boutros-Ghali—a thing that I never thought that I would do—who, as secretary-general, was asked to respond to the security council about how it could improve peacekeeping and peace enforcement. Those are key phrases that we could align with the debate today.

In his response, “An Agenda for Peace”, he came up with the term “peacebuilding”. That is

post-conflict social and political reconstruction activities, aimed at preventing a relapse into conflict. What distinguishes it from peacekeeping and peacemaking is the insistence on society-wide reconciliation. That applies to policing. Proactive policing is good. Enforcement is reactive. We should treat the disease of violence, and the fact that it has collaboratively been recognised as a disease is helpful.

We have seen some movement in Government. I welcome that the Government moved the drugs portfolio from the Justice portfolio to Health. The Labour amendment to the motion notes success, and we will support it. Like the minister, I am sorry that we did not get into a debate on the Liberal Democrat motion, which was not accepted. It included significant issues that we need to look at. I am happy to reflect on the success that is there.

There is a way to go on the issue because, although the drugs portfolio has changed, there is the issue of supervised injecting facilities. I want to see an end to the so-called war on drugs. Language is important, and we do tend to use a lot of violent imagery.

Liam Kerr: Will the member give way?

John Finnie: Yes.

Liam Kerr: I am grateful to the member—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, I have to call you first. It is a little technicality. I call Liam Kerr.

Liam Kerr: I did not disagree with anything that the member had said up until that point, but I will disagree with him now. Does the member not accept that Niven Rennie’s contribution at the weekend is very important and that, in order to avoid complacency, we should pick up the issue in our amendment to the motion?

John Finnie: There is no way—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The same applies to you, Mr Finnie.

John Finnie: I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have to earn my keep. On you go.

John Finnie: Yes, indeed.

No, we will not support the Conservative amendment for the reasons that Mr Johnson has outlined. Someone cannot stand up and bandy about figures and not be accurate themselves—that simply is not appropriate.

I have the highest regard for Niven Rennie, and his predecessor Mr Carnochan. The violence reduction unit has made a very positive contribution. The reality is that Niven Rennie will

contribute to that—and no doubt he will use his many years of experience in doing so.

There can be a legislative response on drugs and the associated violence but, unfortunately, at this time, it is not in the gift of this Parliament to introduce such legislation.

Huge strides have been made in relation to domestic violence—navigators have already been mentioned a number of times and that approach is very positive. The minister also mentioned various initiatives. We all frequently commend the work of Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland.

The issue is not always simply about money, but about the structures that are in place to support those suffering from domestic abuse. There are specialist police units and specialist units within the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, and decisions are taken about policy and fast-tracking specialist courts. An issue that I will keep coming back to is judicial training, because ignorance abounds on the bench on occasions—hopefully the number of times that that happens is reducing. Legislation is in place that deals with the treatment of complainers and witnesses; the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill has also been introduced. Those measures all encourage people to come forward, if they have confidence in the system.

Yes, we have a way to go. An area of violence that has been recognised in legislation—it was fascinating to work on this issue in the Justice Committee—is coercive and controlling behaviour and the psychological violence that we see. The violence reduction unit has carried out work on bullying in the workplace and in school, and on the violence that we see visited on people through the use of technology.

It is important that support for children is in place that recognises the problem that comes with exposure to the disease of violence. Someone said to me about my member's bill, which will be discussed here in the coming months, that violence against children is the last acceptable form of domestic violence. My bill enjoys support from police officers, social workers, paediatricians, Scottish Women's Aid and many other organisations. One comment in support of the bill says:

"There are no studies showing that children's behaviour improves as a result of physical punishment and most show that it has a negative impact on a child's long-term ... well-being".

There are lessons to take from violence. We can all learn—and, on that particular issue, there is no one who knows more than me what can be learned.

The role of alcohol—

The Presiding Officer is indicating that I should close. Early intervention and support from the third sector are vital to people, and it is important that we support the third sector.

15:43

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): This is my first opportunity to welcome Ash Denham to her new post. I congratulate her on the tone of her remarks and I indicate my willingness to take up the offer that she extended regarding further discussions about throughcare.

A little like John Finnie, I saw the debate as an opportunity to put on record my thanks to the police and the range of public and third sector organisations in health, education and social work and elsewhere that have played a part in achieving the impressive reduction in violence that we have seen in Glasgow.

Niven Rennie was correct, of course, when he cautioned against seeing the reduction of violence to a level that suggests that "we've cracked it". Too many communities across the country still endure unacceptable levels of violence, and the A and E departments, as Niven Rennie warns us, continue to deal

"with far higher numbers of serious assaults than those reported to police."

That is a powerful argument against any sense of complacency. It is not, however, a reason not to acknowledge and celebrate the progress that has been made by the VRU. That progress has been achieved in large part, as others have said, by adopting an innovative approach that views violence as a public health issue requiring treatment—as we would treat a disease. Such has been the success of that approach that the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has announced his intention to adopt a similar model in that city. The recent escalation in violence in communities across London has been alarming, characterised very often by tit-for-tat attacks that bear all the hallmarks of a contagion. In that respect, I hope that the VRU approach will prove as successful in London as it has clearly been in Glasgow.

In the Scottish context, where do we go from here? How do we build on the success of what the VRU has achieved to date? Is it realistic to think that we will ever get to a point where, in Niven Rennie's words, we can say, "we've cracked it"?

Although the motion sets out future priorities, it is less clear about the actions that will accompany those. Addressing underlying causes, such as poverty or inequality, and factors to do with attitude or behaviour, takes time. Although short cuts are superficially appealing in order to allay public anxieties, they are unlikely ever to be truly effective or deliver lasting improvement.

The VRU has shown that holistic support structures work. That lesson can be carried through to other areas of our criminal justice system. One area where Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that there is more that we could be doing—and that would deliver real benefits in reducing the risk of violence and other types of offending behaviour—is in relation to the support that we provide to those emerging from the prison system.

Extending the presumption against ineffective, short prison sentences in the first place is important and the Government must press ahead with introducing that as quickly as possible. However, more can and should be done for those in our prison system. Making the provision of throughcare more widely available, rather than limiting statutory provision to prisoners serving four years or more, would be a good start. It would also be consistent with the principles underlying the success of the VRU.

A recent report by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland confirmed that point, but found that, overall,

“there are lengthy waiting lists for many key programmes”

and that

“prisoners are at risk of being released into the community without having completed treatment programmes designed to reduce future reoffending”.

That is disappointing and shows that we can and must do better.

Providing support to individuals while they are in prison helps to break the vicious cycle of recidivism. That includes support with issues such as finding housing, substance misuse, education and training, and money management. Ensuring continuity in that support after release is essential—the support must be seamless. As the VRU shows, co-ordination can deliver real benefits for the individual, the community and society as a whole.

However, as it stands, those benefits are not being realised. In May 2018, David Strang said,

“I have seen too often people leaving prison with approximately £75 in their pocket and with the prospect of having to wait several weeks before being eligible for basic benefits.”

He added that many of those people “end up homeless”, which has a clear consequential risk of them reverting to reoffending behaviour, keeping the wrong company and in many cases, turning to violence.

The success of the VRU relies on accepting the need to take a longer term perspective. Based on David Strang's account, the same cannot yet be said for how our courts and prisons treat violent offenders. I accept that delivering proper

throughcare across the prison population is likely to be costly. However, all the evidence shows that failing to do it is considerably more costly.

We owe it to those across the public and third sectors who have contributed to the success of the VRU—and many more who are working hard to reduce the violence that still blights too many of our communities—to be bold. Enabling the expansion of good quality throughcare in prisons and communities across the country is one way of demonstrating that boldness of ambition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I move on to the open debate, I remind members that because of the limits of our technology, if you intervene, your request-to-speak button goes off. It is just one of those things. Surely we can overcome that? We can send people into space, so we must be able to get buttons to go back on. I will leave it there.

15:49

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I associate myself with Liam McArthur's comments on throughcare. I do not touch on it in my speech, but I agree with him on all those points—and with much of what John Finnie said, too.

Much of what I am about to say has already been said in the opening speeches, but it is worth repeating, because it is a success story. The overall picture shows that Scotland has made great progress in reducing violence and there has been a sustained long-term reduction in violent crime in Scotland over the last decade.

I believe that that is the result of the Scottish Government adopting a public health approach to tackling violence, as advocated by the World Health Organization. The emphasis is on prevention activity such as education and early intervention, which we know always works; partnership working with the national health service, local authorities and community groups; and appropriate law enforcement, as necessary. By continuing to tackle the causes of violence and not just the symptoms, we have broken down the relentless cycle of violence and reduced the terrible impact that it has had on individuals, families and communities.

I was born in Glasgow—a city that was once known as no mean city. As we have heard, the World Health Organization described it as the murder capital of Europe in 2005, due to gang violence and its aggressive reputation. We all know that, thankfully, that is no longer the case due to the progress that has been made, which has seen Glasgow's murder rate drop by 60 per cent. Even the World Economic Forum has praised Scotland's efforts in reducing violence,

with the new approach seeing violent crime in Scotland decrease by 49 per cent—almost half—in the past decade.

The Scottish Government is fully committed to preventing and reducing violence and it has invested over £14 million in violence prevention measures and programmes since 2008. As we have heard, a key part of the Government's work to tackle violence is support for Police Scotland's violence reduction unit, which is a renowned national centre of expertise on violence. It aims to reduce violent crime and behaviour by working with partner agencies to achieve long-term societal and attitudinal change and, by focusing on enforcement, to contain and manage individuals who carry weapons or who are involved in violent behaviour.

The SVRU began in 2005, when Strathclyde Police established a violence reduction unit to target all forms of violent behaviour and, in particular, knife crime and weapon carrying among young men in and around Glasgow. Following the success of the unit, the programme was extended nationwide, and since 2008 the SVRU has been funded by the Government to the tune of £12 million.

Liam Kerr: Does the member share my concern that so little is being done to reduce violent crime in the most deprived areas, such that the victimisation rate has remained fundamentally unchanged for a decade?

Rona Mackay: I am just not sure how the member can evidence the statement that so little is being done in the most deprived areas. I do not know where that is coming from. A lot of focus has been on the deprived areas.

Similar programmes exist around the world that are not delivered through the police. Violence reduction programmes in Chicago operate through the university, for example, while similar programmes in New York and Baltimore are administered through the cities' health departments.

The SVRU team is a mixture of researchers, police officers, civilian staff and former offenders who have turned their lives around and are now succeeding in helping others to do the same. I believe that its early pioneers, John Carnochan and Karyn McCluskey, will go down in history as being instrumental in eradicating the unacceptably high levels of violence in Scotland. They had the monumental task of making a difference, and they did that by offering hope to so many disengaged and disadvantaged young people. They offered them hope, and that was what they needed to turn their lives around.

The SVRU introduced the mentors in violence prevention programme after seeing its success in

America. Again, it learned from good practice. The MVP programme trains students in the skills to safely intervene and prevent violence in Scotland.

As the minister said, we learned only this week that Scotland's approach to tackling violence is being adopted by other areas of the United Kingdom. London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, has already been incorporating elements of the public health approach in his knife crime strategy, and a violence reduction unit has been set up on a similar model to ours.

Earlier this month, I held an event in Parliament to highlight the work of Professor Ross Deuchar, assistant dean of the University of the West of Scotland, who is researching a radical new approach to rehabilitating and healing violent offenders in Denmark. Professor Deuchar is a Scottish criminologist who is known primarily for his work on gangs, masculinity, street culture, violence and gang desistance, as well as policing, procedural justice and focused deterrence strategies. He is also the author of a new book called "Gangs and Spirituality: Global Perspectives". His work has spanned three continents and he has worked with the most marginalised gang members on the streets, in youth clubs and in secure accommodation and prisons.

The event in Parliament focused on groundbreaking new work on the healing effect of yoga, meditation and breathing to prevent offending, with members of the Danish breathe smart programme demonstrating the technique.

To say that the event was fascinating is an understatement. We heard from Jerry Rasmussen, who is a self-confessed former violent criminal whose life has been turned around by that practice. He was lost. He had a high adverse childhood experiences count, and he had known only a life of violence and criminality. However, he started to live again because of the patience of the breathe smart team. It was emotional and uplifting to see the real man behind the formerly macho, defensive and desperately unhappy offender he once was. To use a cliché, that restored my faith in human nature and reinforced my view that we can and must find alternatives to reducing violent behaviour and reoffending.

The Art of Living Foundation provides classes and programmes to individuals and organisations throughout the UK. Its vision is of a stress-free and violence-free world. Who would not want that?

In conclusion, I am proud that Scotland is at the forefront of tackling violence. We must never get complacent and there will always be work to do, of course, but we have come a long way since the days of no mean city.

15:55

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I welcome and acknowledge the improvements that we have seen in Scotland since the rather damning report by the United Nations in 2005, which declared Scotland to be the most violent country in the developed world. According to the University of California, Scotland had a higher violent death rate than America had at that time. As we have heard, those reports came after the World Health Organization had revealed in 2002 that 34.1 per cent of males in Scotland had carried weapons at least once during their lifetime. It is clear that that is not a description of Scotland that any of us ever wants to see again.

In the child poverty debate last week, I highlighted the principle that we cannot just battle with the symptoms of an issue, but must deal with it at the root. Today's debate has highlighted an excellent example of doing just that.

I add my congratulations to the violence reduction unit and welcome the incredibly impressive results that it has achieved. Part of the reason why I want to talk about it relates to what Daniel Johnson mentioned. I loved the description of the approach that the VRU took in addressing the problem as if it were a disease. First, it diagnoses the problem. It then analyses the causes and examines what works and for whom. Finally, it develops solutions. Once evaluated, those solutions could be scaled up to help others. It is brilliant that Scotland has gone out there and is genuinely starting to help others, and it chuffs me no end that London is coming to us for help. That is to be celebrated.

Perhaps most important is that the VRU did not seek a quick fix. It wanted to change society's attitude to violence and to bring about partnership working between the police and the health, education and social work services. It does not mention the third sector on the front page of its website, but I am sure that it is involved.

That is what makes the approach possible. Long-term attitudinal changes in society are often missed when actions and policies are tied to short-term funding solutions. I have experienced that myself. Funding often ends for effective projects simply because funders seek new, exciting ideas. I am pleased that more than a decade on from the formation of the VRU, it is still going strong and continues to roll out the principles on which it started its work.

I am extremely impressed that the VRU is the only police member of the World Health Organization's violence prevention alliance. This is about changing the attitude that the solution is just about enforcement, and instead thinking about

violence as something that is embedded in society that we need to address.

The Scottish Government is quite right to highlight the success, and I am very happy to add my voice in welcoming it.

Here comes the "but". There is always a "however", isn't there? My colleague Liam Kerr and others have said that, in celebrating and welcoming success, we must not be complacent or take our eye off the ball. Although we are keen to stress that, nationally, crime rates are falling and things are improving, that is not always the whole story.

Niven Rennie has been mentioned a few times. He has said that

"There is still too much violence",

and A and E departments are dealing with far higher numbers of serious assaults than are reported to the police.

I had a look at what is going on in some areas in South Scotland. In my region, there are worrying trends that underlie the national figures. Figures from the past year in the Borders show that there has been a 13 per cent increase in recorded crime. We have seen a 20 per cent increase in sex offences and a 17 per cent increase in housebreaking. Other offences, including weapons and drugs offences, have risen by 29 per cent.

Humza Yousaf: I thank Michelle Ballantyne for her thoughtful contribution. I caution the use of the word "trend" when using one year's figures. The trend has been downward throughout the decade. Using just one year's figures can be a danger.

Michelle Ballantyne: I accept that point, but there is concern when the figures suddenly start to rise again, and we need to look at that. I accept and do not dispute that the overall trend is down.

Some progress has been made this year in the Scottish Borders. The Conservative and independent led council is using its budget to support a community action policing team, which is having positive effects. However, I question whether it is right that our local councils are contributing to policing on our streets; we may need to think about that.

I hope that the Deputy Presiding Officer will forgive me for mentioning that she was quoted in a recent issue of the *Midlothian Advertiser* as saying that

"crime is at its lowest in ... forty years",

—which is quite correct—and claiming that that

"proves that the SNP's approach to issues such as knife crime is paying dividends for our communities."

That is, nationally, quite correct.

Unfortunately, in Midlothian, overall crime has risen by 12 per cent, which is one of the biggest rises in crime in a local authority area in Scotland. The local area commander, Chief Inspector Kenny Simpson, regularly raises the subject of antisocial behaviour in the newspaper. He felt compelled to write an article which had the headline “Number of youths armed with weapons is cause for concern”, in which he referenced a recent spike in vandalism. I caution that national figures can sometimes hide local issues. In welcoming improvements, we must also be willing to acknowledge what we still need to tackle.

There are still issues that concern me and members of the public. We have visited some of those debates here, including on the soft-touch approach, on early release dates for offenders and on there being fewer front-line officers. Overall, I congratulate everyone who has contributed to the positive national trend, but there is still work to do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for the name check.

16:02

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure to speak in the debate. I declare an interest as a social worker registered with the Scottish Social Services Council; I spent four years prior to my election working in the criminal justice field, so I was, as members will imagine, pleased when I heard that the World Economic Forum has recognised Scotland’s progress in reducing violence and its complete overhaul of its record and approach.

Crime in Scotland has decreased significantly since 2006-07, in no small part thanks to the violence reduction unit, which was founded in 2005. The figures are stark. Between April 2006 and April 2011 in Scotland, 40 children and teenagers were killed in homicides that involved knives. Between 2011 and 2016, the figure fell to eight. I am very clear that every death is unacceptable and that that figure is still eight too many. I will put Liam Kerr’s mind at ease and say that by no means is there complacency. In Glasgow, the figure between 2011 and 2016 was zero. That is where we need to get for the whole country, although it is clear that the plan is working.

To people like me who have worked in the area, it is a pleasing but not surprising start. I know first hand the great work that is done by all the agencies in the criminal justice system, including help to rehabilitate people who have served custodial sentences; the “change now Caledonia” programme that works with people who commit domestic violence offences; substance misuse

and addiction programmes; and youth justice approaches. The list goes on.

I dispute Neil Findlay’s assertions that public services do not have the money to do the work, because that is not what I have seen and experienced. I could spend literally my whole six minutes just listing public and third sector services, but of course I am not going to do that. However, it is only right that I pay tribute to all the people who work across the sector, including my former colleagues who do a fine job in challenging circumstances.

At the core of our approach is a welfare and human-rights based model, which is why social workers carry out much of the intervention work, rather than parole officers, as is the case in England. As has been said, violence is a complex issue that comes in many forms. It is clear that there is a strong link between poverty, adverse childhood experiences and violent crime. There is a well-documented—

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: I will not, just now.

There is also a well documented, strong and complex interplay between unemployment, homelessness, mental health and addiction issues, and offending and violence. I am therefore a staunch believer that we should focus on the causes of violence, which is why it needs to be said clearly that the Tory welfare and austerity cuts are plunging our children and vulnerable people into dire poverty and hunger. The cuts will limit our youngsters’ chances and increase the likelihood of violent offending. Every party in the chamber should applaud the Scottish Government for reversing that trend, in the face of those inhumane policies, through, for example, cashback for communities and other initiatives.

Liam Kerr: On that point—

Fulton MacGregor: If I have time later, I will take an intervention from the member.

Since 2008, the Scottish Government has invested £14 million in violence prevention measures. A key part of the Scottish Government’s work to tackle violence is Police Scotland’s violence reduction unit. The internationally recognised SVRU was set up with the aim of reducing violent crimes and behaviours by working in conjunction with partner agencies to achieve long-term societal and attitudinal change. It is essential that we focus on enforcement to contain and manage individuals who carry weapons or are involved in violent behaviour.

There are some really good national policies. For example, the presumption against the short-term sentence is absolutely vital if we are serious

about reducing reoffending. There is also the issue of remand; I look forward to taking part in the debate on remand in the chamber in a couple of weeks, following the Justice Committee's inquiry.

There needs to be scope for local interventions. We heard how in Glasgow the challenges to gang culture have helped to reduce violent crime. In my area, Coatbridge and Chryston, the statistics are looking good—they certainly reflect the national reduction in violent crime—but we are by no means ready to celebrate, just yet. There are significant issues with mental health; police officers report routinely that they are the first port of call for people who need treatment. There are also major issues with drugs, statistics on which for Lanarkshire regularly make the local news.

However, I want to finish by focusing on alcohol and its link to violent crime in my part of the world. A couple of weeks ago, the local paper, the *Airdrie & Coatbridge Advertiser*, released shocking figures. It said that more people were admitted to Monklands A and E for alcohol-related harm than to any other hospital in the area—1,800 patients since 2015. That is perhaps not surprising in an area that has been devastated by years of deindustrialisation, Tory policies and unemployment, which have resulted in generational unemployment, crime and poor health outcomes.

Most members will have heard of Buckfast tonic wine—commonly referred to as Buckie—which is a high-volume alcoholic drink that is associated mainly with Coatbridge and Airdrie. I will not fight with my colleague Alex Neil over this, but it is also associated with most other Lanarkshire towns; indeed, most towns there will have rivalries over which is the Buckfast capital. It is not a new issue or something to be mocked or scoffed at.

I found some startling figures. Between 2008 and 2012, Buckfast was mentioned in an average of 2,893 crime reports a year by Strathclyde Police. That works out at just under eight a day. That is backed up by crime reports that I saw when I worked in the sector. Buckfast is not subject to minimum unit pricing. That is not coincidence. There is a link between alcohol misuse and violent crime, but there is clearly a problem with that particular choice. One of the main problems is that the bottle is made of glass. In accounts of violent incidents, bottles appear to be a more frequently used weapon than any other, making Buckfast not only a precursor to violent behaviour and crime, but a tool that is readily available to use.

Michelle Ballantyne: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): No. Mr MacGregor is just finishing.

Fulton MacGregor: I join the long list of politicians who are calling on the manufacturer to consider other materials for the bottles. A survey that was conducted at Polmont young offenders institution in 2007 produced striking results. Of offenders who had been drunk at the time of their crime, 43 per cent had been drinking Buckfast. There is clearly a link, albeit that the statistics are not fully up to date.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have to come to a close, Mr MacGregor.

Fulton MacGregor: I had other things to say about local agencies, but I will finish by saying that the statistics are very good. They are not surprising to me—a lot of good work is going on. I commend the Scottish Government for the work that it is doing, but as everyone has said, there is more to be done.

16:08

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I join my colleague Rona Mackay in associating myself with Liam McArthur's comments about through care. Unless we can get that right, predominantly for men leaving prison, we are setting people up to fail and it will not help anybody.

Violence is a complex issue that comes in many forms. Beyond the obvious health problems that result from violence, and beyond the psychological trauma and physical injuries, violent behaviour in itself is an epidemic that spreads from person to person. To break cycles of violence and reduce the harm that is done to individuals, their families and communities, we must tackle the causes and not just the symptoms of violence.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to that approach and, in particular, the work of the Scottish violence reduction unit, which has been recognised internationally as being at the forefront of Scotland's approach to preventing violence. The unit team is a mixture of researchers, police officers, civilian staff and former offenders. Its remit is to tackle violence in all its forms, from gang fighting to domestic abuse to bullying in schools and the workplace. It has had many successes—a fact that was reflected in the announcement on Wednesday that London will echo Scotland's approach to violence by treating it as a public health issue. That public health approach, which has been advocated by the World Health Organization and adopted by the Scottish Government, is effective. Prevention activity such as early education and early intervention, alongside appropriate law enforcement, is essential.

Crime in Scotland has decreased and most people feel safe in our communities. However,

while celebrating successes in tackling violence and crime, we also have a duty to hear and act on some of the less comfortable facts. John Carnochan has told us that

“crime figures are only a small measure—and not a great one at that—of the levels of violence. In Scotland we found that only one third to one half of people in accident and emergency as a result of violence report it to the police. The ones which hadn’t reported to us had resolved to deal with the matter themselves, which led to more violence.”

With that in mind, I want to pick up on a particular strand of SVRU work that is based in hospitals. I was really pleased—in fact, I was absolutely delighted—to learn in the programme for government that the navigator project is being extended and that navigators will shortly be starting work in Crosshouse hospital, which serves my constituency. The aim of the navigator project is to break the cycle of violence for the individual, ease the pressure that violence places on the NHS and stop the revolving door of violent injury in our hospitals by identifying and supporting people in emergency departments or wards at the point of need. Navigators do that by talking to patients who have been affected by violence and using a wide range of contacts, services and resources outside the emergency room to offer help and support to those patients to change their lives.

Commenting on the work, Donogh Maguire, who is a senior emergency department consultant, said:

“This is possibly the most valuable non-medical change in the management of A&E in the whole course of my career. I think for inner-city hospitals this should be a standard means of engaging with the homeless and disenfranchised people that we have coming to our departments. The reason I say this is because the current mechanisms are failing or the people are not engaging with them, whereas here we’re getting the Navigators catching people at a time when they’re amenable to some intervention.”

I was also struck by comments that were made by people who are currently working as navigators when they were asked about the best and worst parts of their job. Sam Fingland said that best bit was

“Probably seeing the changes that people make themselves.”

She said that she is just there to “ignite that little spark” and that it is “rewarding” work. She also said:

“The job does exactly what it says it will do and that’s to help people navigate”

and make changes.

Tam is also a navigator. He said that the best bit is

“Outcomes. I think that most Navigators will tell you the same, it’s what gives you the energy to come back weekend after weekend. It’s seeing that little bit of positivity

in a person’s life that wasn’t there before. We’re not super heroes, we’re just helping people to save themselves by giving them hope, energy and self-belief.”

He said that the most difficult part is that

“you sometimes end up wanting change more than they do at that particular point in time. Maybe they haven’t fallen hard enough or they’re just not ready for it. ... It’s difficult but we have to remain positive that at some point when they’re ready they will get back to us.”

I said in opening that violence is a complex issue. It is, but it is not inevitable. Tackling it is the business of all of us. I commend all the people who are involved in that really important work, particularly those on the front line who are kindly, compassionately and tenaciously refusing to give up on those whom society finds it all too easy to ignore. I say to them, keep up the good work and never stop challenging and pushing those of us who could be described as being in the most corrosive gangs of all.

Scotland has made great progress, but as long as anyone suffers something that is not inevitable, and as long as even one person is suffering from violence, we still have a power of work to do.

16:14

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Recently, I have found from speaking to a number of people on the front line—whether prisoners, drug users, counsellors, medical staff or police officers—that they paint a very realistic and sobering picture of what is going on in our communities. Of course, we all welcome any reduction in crime, but the repeated trotting out of figures telling us that crime is at an all-time low and the like has little relevance to people whose lives are impacted by crime, violence, drugs and other social manifestations of an increasingly divided society.

James Dornan: Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: Yes, well—get it out the way quickly.

James Dornan: It is not a political point, Mr Findlay. A bit more manners would be helpful.

Would you not accept that those who would have been affected by violence before and are now not being affected by it are seeing the benefit of the serious drop in crime?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: First, members should always speak through the chair. Secondly, we should always be polite to fellow members and it is for me to decide whether something is impolite or otherwise.

Neil Findlay: In response to James Dornan’s point, I said that we welcome that drop—absolutely. Of course, anybody who lives in a community where there is violence welcomes the

fact that things are happening to reduce that violence.

However, crime and violence are a condition of the society and economy that we live in. Only by treating violence as the ill that people have spoken about have we begun to make progress. That was the philosophy behind the Labour-led coalition Government establishing the violence reduction unit in the first place. There was a recognition that poverty, hopelessness and the impact of deindustrialisation had created the conditions for crime, antisocial behaviour and violence to flourish and that only by addressing those deep-seated problems in affected communities could we possibly deal with their often violent manifestations.

Whereas once there was reliable employment, secure housing and cohesive communities, now people have been left with precarious jobs, scarce or unaffordable homes and public services in a state of apparently permanent contraction. In many areas, drugs have taken hold, destabilising communities and setting individuals on paths of self-destruction. The combination of an ideological obsession with austerity and spending cuts feeds division, alienation, frustration and powerlessness.

It is unsurprising that some young people look at their future, compare it with that of their peers and think that there is an easier way out through drug use or dealing, organised crime, theft or other criminal activity, which is often a gateway to violent conflict. We have to look beyond that.

Public services are the key—they are the glue that holds our society together. If we cut youth work and cash going to drug and alcohol projects, allow social workers to drown in case work and the educational divide to widen, condition young workers to expect no more than a low-paid, precarious job, and leave communities in a state of decline and shrug our shoulders, saying that it is just a consequence of austerity, we do not have a chance of reversing the situation.

The decision by Scottish Labour to treat violent crime as a public health issue was the right one and we need to apply that principle to other areas of society, in particular drugs policy. Daniel Johnson mentioned that the violence reduction unit was set up as a result of 70 deaths a year through violence. We have 1,000 deaths a year through drugs—14 times as many. Where is the national emergency in that? It is a crisis—a crisis—and we are doing very little about it.

If we think that we can arrest our way to a drug or crime-free society, we are seriously deluded. We need to invest in local services and projects such as the violent offender watch project in Edinburgh and the Lothians, which works with Aid & Abet, a charitable organisation. VOW has been

reducing violent offending by encouraging repeat offenders to address their behaviour and engage with mentoring services. The support workers from Aid & Abet are ex-offenders, and they include my constituents, the inspirational Kevin Neary and Donald Tumilowicz, who spoke in Parliament at an event that I organised earlier this year. They have reduced offending by over 80 per cent among the client group that they work with and they have an uptake rate of nearly 50 per cent. It is a strategy that accepts that we can reduce crime and get people back on the road to recovery more quickly and effectively if we work with them than if we work against them.

There is clear evidence that that approach is working—the project has saved £7 million, yet it exists on a shoestring. The project has to get lottery funding to keep going, and there is no certainty that it will continue. It should not be under constant threat; it should be rolled out across the country. I urge the cabinet secretary to meet me and representatives of VOW and Aid & Abet so that we can look not just at how to secure funding for the project but at how we can roll out such projects across the country, because those kinds of schemes make moral, political and financial sense. Our aim should be to create long-term attitudinal change rather than a quick fix.

I spoke about drugs policy, and I will continue to speak about it, because we have a national crisis on our hands. If having the highest number of drugs deaths in Europe does not qualify as a public health emergency, I surely do not know what does.

16:20

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

The reasons for having the debate fill me with no complacency but a great sense of pride in what Scotland has achieved over the past decade and a half. I suspect that I am the only speaker in the debate who lived through being a teenager in Glasgow in the 1960s and 1970s, when I was blessed by listening to the best music and watching the best football team of all time. However, the one blight for most teenage boys back then was the threat of violence. Never a week went past without our hearing of a friend, schoolmate, colleague or even family member being the victim of a random attack, or being caught in the wrong place when two gangs were fighting, perhaps when coming home from football.

It gives me great hope for the future to see Glasgow go from being Europe's murder capital to a situation where the World Economic Forum can congratulate us on the huge decrease in murders and violence. Of course, random violence, murder, serious assaults and other offences still occur, but we have come such a long way from the days

when the surgeons in Johannesburg were recognised as the finest gunshot surgeons in the world and those of the Glasgow Royal infirmary as the finest at dealing with stab wounds.

How did we get here? The Scottish violence reduction unit's website welcomes readers with the phrase

"Violence is preventable—not inevitable".

Those words are important to me. As I look back over my younger years, I cannot help but wonder how many young men and women were written off because a life of violence, perpetrated by and against them, was seen as inevitable. Society just expected young people from certain areas to develop certain behaviours, because they were caught in a cycle, and that was just how it was.

Even back then, there were organisations that worked to deflect young men from that path of destruction, and they, too, should be remembered for their good work. However, it was only when the SVRU took an example from Boston and decided to approach the culture of macho violence differently that real strides began to be made in getting those men to see that there was another way. I congratulate the Labour coalition on bringing it in.

It took guidance, time and a better understanding of the many reasons behind violent behaviour before the problem could be faced head on. Experts now recognise the complex and varied reasons why a person may have violent tendencies. That is why the SVRU is due all the praise that has been heaped on it, not only from the World Economic Forum but in the chamber today. When Scotland becomes an independent country and we are bandying about names for statues or some other form of public recognition for people who have helped to make Scotland the modern, welcoming and peaceful society that it has become, two names at the top of my list will be John Carnochan and Karyn McLuskey. Without their drive and vision, I doubt very much that we would be having this debate. In case I forget to do so later, I will just say how pleased I am that Niven Rennie is now in charge of the SVRU—I can think of no one better.

The great thing about the SVRU was that it knew that the task could not be done by the police alone, so it adopted a multipronged public health approach. I have been absolutely fascinated to read about some of the other tactics that have been used, with the unit involving people such as hairdressers, dentists, firemen and vets to identify victims. We must also congratulate the Scottish Government on its continuing support for the SVRU, without which I doubt it would be able to continue as at present.

I have concentrated on male-to-male youth violence, for the simple reason that it is still by far the most likely type of random violence. However, we should not forget the other types of devastating violence, which can manifest in many forms, such as sexual, physical and, of course, emotional abuse. It is a multifaceted problem that can be tackled only with a rounded and interorganisational approach.

In my constituency alone, amazing work is being done with projects such as the Castlemilk Youth Complex, a project that, uniquely, is run for young people by young people. The project takes young people off the streets and puts them into community arts programmes. It seeks to find each young person's unique talents and gifts and encourage them to be used in a fantastic way, through theatre and music.

Southside boxing academy, which trains in Mount Florida, has more than 100 members. It keeps its members off the streets and gives them the sense of self-worth that many of them lack.

Amazing work is also being done by women against violent environments, or WAVES, and the domestic abuse integrated support—DAISy—project, which seek to support young women to flee the horrific crime of domestic abuse. The projects provide not just a refuge but information and support, to enable broken women and children to rebuild their lives.

Every year, in June, another Castlemilk group, lost lives, invites the community to take part in a memorial garden. The garden is a wall of flowers, which are placed by people who have lost a loved one to violent crime, abuse or other horrendous circumstances throughout the years. This summer, my staff and I took time to read the many cards that friends and families had placed with the hundreds of flowers. There were memories of brothers, sons, husbands, fathers, sisters, daughters and friends—not one case was more or less tragic than the next.

I wish that I could show members the photos of that garden of loss, because that alone would remind each and every one of us why we must continue in our fight to reduce violent crime—and drug use; I agree with Neil Findlay on that—and encourage future generations to follow a different path. We must support the Scottish violence reduction unit's motto and declare that violence really is preventable, not inevitable.

16:26

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I welcome Ash Denham to her new post and I hope that all goes well for her.

We are here today to discuss how further reductions in the most harmful crimes can be secured. Violence in Scotland is undoubtedly a concern for the people whom we represent. We cannot afford to deny the threat of violent crime in our communities, especially if the issue is not dealt with openly and effectively. I welcome this opportunity to debate the ways in which violence reduction measures can achieve success in Scotland in future.

I recognise that the violence reduction unit has made crucial progress. The unit's original aim was to target the worsening levels of violence in Glasgow, but its remit spread to include the entirety of Scotland, with a goal to tackle all forms of violence, including bullying in the workplace and in schools, domestic abuse and gang fighting.

The violence reduction unit works closely with groups in health, social work and education, to develop approaches to the causes of violence and solutions to problems. We can see the efforts that the unit has made, and I welcome its contribution to lowering crime in Scotland. Indeed, it can be argued that the unit's public health approach to violence has halved the number of facial trauma patients in Glasgow's hospitals and has reduced the city's murder rate by 60 per cent.

Although the Scottish Government has hailed those results as a complete success, we must recognise that the problem of violence in Scotland has in no way disappeared. Official statistics do not include the innumerable instances of unrecorded violent crime, and surveys and health data show the rate of violent crime to be much higher than the Government claims it to be. Niven Rennie made clear recently that there is still too much violence for "a progressive society". We note that the VRU has issued a clarification of the headline figure that was used in that newspaper report, but the fundamental point remains that the figures that the SNP puts out in press releases are inaccurate. That is unfortunate.

According to the Scottish crime and justice survey, it is estimated that only 37 per cent of crimes were reported to the police in 2016-17. That means that we do not have a true picture of crime rates in Scotland and how to tackle the problem effectively. It is undeniable that violent crime is still an issue in Scotland. It represents about a third of all crime, and an estimated 231,000 violent crimes affected adults in Scotland last year. It is worrying that between 2014 and 2017 the number of violent crimes increased by 45,000.

That is an especially alarming discovery when we consider that cuts have been made in Scotland's police force. If we restrict policing, we fail to take seriously the safety of our communities. Surely the cuts have contributed to the rise in

street robberies and the confidence of criminals that they will not be caught.

Humza Yousaf: I remind the member that the number of police officers is up 938 on the number that we inherited. If he thinks that we are not doing enough for policing, what does he make of the Tory Government, under which policing has fallen by 13 per cent—or 19,588 officers—in England and Wales?

Maurice Corry: The fact is that the SNP made the protection of police numbers its flagship policy and said that it would provide more support for the police and for various programmes. The SNP cannot deny that, but that support needs to be put in place, so that more effective use can be made of the police. I will make further points that will reinforce that.

The fall in police numbers also means that the threat of gang crime will become harder to target. The rise in the number of gangs has become alarming, because of their increased use of firearms and violence. Therefore, we need more community police officers in our communities, where local knowledge is paramount. That relates to the point that I made to the cabinet secretary.

Violence continues to be a problem in our communities, so the Government must admit the need to have an accurate picture of the state of crime in Scotland. The violence reduction unit has raised the issue of continued violence and has warned against ignoring crime the statistics on which are unrecorded. Without governmental recognition of the rise in the number of violent offences, the VRU will not be able to reach the full potential of its excellent services.

If the Government is to take significant steps forward in violence reduction, the unrecorded rate of violent crime must be taken into account. Crimes such as attempted murder and serious assaults are too common for the Government to become complacent. Rather, we should find ways in which they can be actively reduced. In particular, efforts should be made to reduce the reoffending rate. In my role as an MSP, I have gone round the prisons, and I praise the Government for the successful prisoner support programme that has been introduced in some prisons in Scotland, notably Low Moss prison. I encourage the Government to expand the use of such programmes.

It is my belief that preventative measures should be in place from the start. In that way, the issue of violence can be tackled before it has time to develop and worsen. One area of prevention that surely needs more focus is education. We know that more children are being excluded from school for using knives and makeshift weapons. Those instances of first-time offences can easily lead to

more serious crimes, such as drug taking and violent or sexual abuse, which are all on the rise in Scotland. For that reason, a greater effort must be made to ensure that primary school pupils are taught about the dangers of violence and its consequences.

I note that the no knives, better lives initiative has aimed to deliver training in schools to deter young people from carrying knives, but more funding is needed to raise awareness in schools across deprived areas of Scotland and to support more such initiatives. That will help to ensure that young people are dissuaded from becoming perpetrators in the future. It will also lessen the potential for people to become victims of violence, which is more likely to affect younger adults.

A greater commitment to addressing the seriousness of violent crime in the education of young people should be a fundamental priority. Such a commitment has been demonstrated in the setting up of Police Scotland's youth volunteers programme, representatives of which I met in Parliament the other day. The Government deserves some praise for that.

In connection with that—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will have to come to a close, please, Mr Corry.

Maurice Corry: Yes, I will do. I believe that more robust anger management training would go a long way towards lessening the potential for violent crime. Surely that preventative measure would provide a better understanding of how to pinpoint anger issues and prioritise educational training.

Further—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must come to a close, please.

Maurice Corry: The Scottish Government should encourage armed forces veterans to join Police Scotland when they leave the forces. They are an excellent skills resource.

In conclusion—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, I think that you have concluded, Mr Corry.

Maurice Corry: I hope that the Government will agree with my suggestions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the final speaker in the open debate.

16:33

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I thoroughly appreciated Ash Denham's speech, and I welcome her to her post.

It is a fact that the level of crime is down. Violent crime, in particular, is down dramatically, and that has been the case over a long period of time. The trend began in the final few years of the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive, and it has been progressively built on by our current SNP Scottish Government.

The work of the violence reduction unit and its various partners has clearly been a key driver of that success. I apologise for not saying more about the unit's work, but many members have already done so. However, it is worth pointing out that the successful establishment of the unit was based on political consensus on the need to put violence in the public health domain, and we must continue that consensus, regardless of how we proceed following this afternoon's debate.

The minister acknowledged that the nature of violent crime and how it manifests itself in our communities might be changing, that violence might be presenting itself in a more concentrated fashion in some communities and that there could be more repeat victims.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: Let me develop my point further. Some of that crime is significantly likely to be unreported, too. We have to have a better understanding of such patterns and changes, and we must develop our violence reduction strategies accordingly. That is not complacency—I think that we have a political agreement on that point.

Liam Kerr: I return to the point that I put to Rona Mackay, who was unsure about the research. The Scottish crime and justice survey from 2017 said that the violent crime victimisation rate for adults in the 15 per cent most deprived areas has shown no significant change since 2008-09. Does Bob Doris think that that is something to celebrate, or does he agree with my amendment in saying that we must show no complacency about such statistics?

Bob Doris: It is a real shame that Liam Kerr has wasted my speaking time with that intervention, because I have already said that there are issues that the Government has acknowledged and that we must better understand the patterns of crime and do something about them. I will continue nevertheless.

Perhaps we should look at how we could better direct resources to such areas when we identify the nature of such crimes in our communities. For example, when we look to put more money into deprived areas, Maurice Corry will have my support if he agrees that funding from recovery of the proceeds of crime should not be spread evenly across the country but should be concentrated in deprived areas in which the victims of crime suffer

at the coalface. That would mean getting political consensus on that, and it would mean money leaving Maurice Corry's constituency and going to mine in Maryhill and Springburn. However, we have to be brave if we are serious and sincere about tackling such issues in our deprived communities.

Without being complacent, we can celebrate the fact that violent crime figures are down. I view the debate very much from the aspect of what we can do next. I would like to look at that a little bit. I want to talk about Open Gates, which is an organisation in my constituency. It supports prisoners and ex-prisoners

"through an employment and training programme with the aim of reducing re-offending and stopping the revolving door back into prison",

which has happened all too often. Crucially, it is run by individuals—including the irrepressible Pat Clark—who have managed to break the cycle themselves and who use their experience to mentor and support other offenders to do the same. It is a social enterprise organisation that

"will manufacture, recycle, and upcycle furniture and white goods and sell to the general public".

Open Gates is based just off Possilpark, at the canal, in my constituency. I invite either the minister or the cabinet secretary to come and see for themselves the work that it does. Its funding can be precarious at times. Perhaps there should be more substantial support—through direct funding, or the Scottish Prison Service—to build a sustainable model around that, and to do so across the country. There is a positive suggestion about how we might take things forward.

I do not think that I could be involved in the debate and not mention various youth organisations in my constituency, such as Royston youth action, NUC North United Communities Ltd, Young Peoples Futures or New Rhythms for Glasgow, all of which work with young people. Crucially, however, they are at their best when they are funded not just to offer diversionary activities for young people but to work with young people and their families. When young people go off the rails, some of their behaviour and downward spiral can be replicated in the wider family. I know that the violence reduction unit also uses that model. We should perhaps think more imaginatively about how we can enhance funding for organisations, such as those that I have mentioned, that better networks support to the wider family rather than just to a young person.

Time is almost upon me, so I will make my final point. Earlier, John Finnie mentioned domestic violence, and we know about the success of the White Ribbon Scotland organisation here and globally. Gender-based male-to-female domestic

violence is—or should be—unacceptable. In our most deprived communities we have to create a society in which male-on-male violence is just as unacceptable. That will be a real challenge in some of our communities and in some areas, but it is a nut that we have to crack. We will do so by placing the issue in the public health domain. That is why I celebrate the success of the violence reduction unit and support the motion that is before us this afternoon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:39

Daniel Johnson: I begin by saying something that I should have said in my opening remarks. As we talk about this issue, we ought to bear in mind the people who are on the front line delivering the approach, whether they be police officers, social workers, people working in our schools or those in the third sector. It is only because they have challenged and changed their practices and worked holistically that we have managed to reduce violence in Scotland. For the police in particular, it has meant a fairly significant culture change but one in which they recognise that it is important for them to have relationships on the ground and in the communities where violence is such a problem.

That is where the debate has been useful. It has not been uncontroversial—there have been heated words at times—but that might be the point. It would have been disappointing if there had not been points of controversy, because this is a challenging subject. Not all the things that we will discuss about violence in communities are easy. However, three fundamental things have been discussed. The first is the understanding or diagnosis of the problem. The second is how we need to challenge ourselves around where we can do more, and the third is how we look to the future.

In some ways, the approach to the problem was brought home to me when I was travelling through to Glasgow one day. In the best traditions of Scottish public life, we always bump into interesting people on that Glasgow train and, on that occasion, I sat down next to a key representative of the Scottish Police Federation, who discussed these very issues and talked about how to make progress. He talked about how it is about making early interventions by spotting the problems and intervening before they escalate to full-blown criminality. It is about looking at things such as the impact of the reduction in the number of school exclusions, as well as the reduction in the number of short-term sentences and the number of people going to Polmont. He said that those are chicken-or-egg factors. He even raised a point about lead in fuel. That might seem to be a

random point, but the reduction in lead in fuel across the western world is considered by some to have led to a reduction in violence. My point is that there are many factors that lie behind the reduction in violence, and they are not always obvious. We must be unflinching in looking at them all and the consequences of the decisions that we make in public policy and how they reduce violence.

Niven Rennie has been invoked many times today. I have not been following Twitter, but I have no doubt that he will have given a verdict on whether we have reflected him accurately. There is no doubt that cracking the problem is going to be complicated and we are not there yet.

Michelle Ballantyne talked about the disease analysis. There are so many factors that we need to look at, and I will just introduce one more. Members know that I take a keen interest in ADHD. In the general population, 5 per cent of people have ADHD, and in the prison population, it is 25 per cent, but in Polmont, it is 40 per cent.

Those are some of the things that we need to look at. It is not just about looking at tackling crime by making arrests; it is about looking at the underlying factors and beyond things such as substance misuse and violence. We need to ask ourselves whether there are other underlying factors. Going beyond mental health, are there underlying psychological or neurodevelopmental issues?

A number of other members talked about the complexity of the cultural issues that we need to face when we look at this issue. I refer to Fulton MacGregor, Ruth Maguire, and James Dornan—I agree with him about the music of the 1970s by the way. The complexity was highlighted by Fulton MacGregor talking about alcohol and how it is not just the alcohol that we should be talking about; it is also about the containers that it comes in.

One of the key cultural questions is why only 43 per cent of violent crime is reported. Regardless of which side of the argument members have been on this afternoon, that is a fundamental question. We need to ask ourselves why it is that, in some of our communities and some parts of the country, people feel unable, or feel that it is inappropriate, to report crime to the police. Perhaps that can be one conclusion that comes out of this afternoon's debate.

Something that I forgot to do in my opening remarks is join with others in expressing my support for the sentiment of the Liberal Democrat amendment that was not taken. Liam McArthur made two important points. First, if we are going to tackle violent crime as a cultural issue, we need to look at how individuals are supported as they come into contact with and leave the criminal

justice system, whether that be with throughcare or other measures. That is hugely important. He made one other important point, which is that, ultimately, the levels of violence in our society will reflect the levels of poverty and inequality. Regardless of whatever else we discuss—whatever other measures we talk about and tackle—if we do not tackle poverty and inequality in Scotland, we will not be tackling the fundamental cause of violence in our community. I cannot put it more strongly than that.

In conclusion, I want to reflect on my colleague Neil Findlay's remarks. Drug and substance misuse is one of the most tragic outcomes of poverty and inequality. It is also the outcome of the withdrawal of services. If we are looking at what further things we might do, one idea is to have something like a VRU for drugs, so that we can tackle that issue on a cross-agency, cross-service, holistic manner, in the way that we have tackled violence through the VRU.

16:46

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): It is obvious from today's debate that, across the chamber, there is support for and recognition of the excellent work that has been carried out by the violence reduction unit. As the Minister for Community Safety—who I, too, welcome to her post—Rona Mackay and Michelle Ballantyne stressed, it is a model that other countries are now looking to copy. Having said that, I consider it a great pity that my party will be unable to support the motion this evening, because the Government failed to acknowledge that, although the violence reduction unit has taken amazing strides in reducing violent crime, there is a serious underreporting of violent crime incidents.

Daniel Johnson: I understand that point. If the Labour amendment were agreed to, would Conservative members support the amended motion?

Margaret Mitchell: The same problem would exist with the amended motion, so, sadly, we would still not be able to support it.

If we are to address this serious problem, as we all wish to do, the debate must start with an honest assessment of the situation. Therefore, I commend Niven Rennie, the former president of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents and now the director of the violence reduction unit, for recently highlighting that violent crime is significantly underreported. As Liam Kerr explained, that is based on evidence that hospitals are dealing with far higher numbers of serious assaults than are reported to police. Not only that but, according to Police Scotland, the number of non-sexual crimes of violence rose by 8 per cent

this year, going from 1,900 to 2,051, and the number of crimes that involved an offensive bladed weapon in the same period rose by more than 10 per cent.

That evidence backs up anecdotal evidence from lawyers that, even when a crime such as a serious assault is presented in an accident and emergency department, it is then downgraded to a lesser crime when it is officially reported. Such incidents have included ones in which a police officer has been the victim of an assault. Our front-line officers are under enough strain and stress carrying out their daily duties without having to cope with the downgrading of assaults, which then means that recorded crime statistics paint a rosier picture than might actually be the case. It is crucial that, as in any discussion of official statistics, we never forget that, behind those unreported assaults, there are victims of violent crime who, for a variety of reasons, are either unwilling to seek or unable to get justice.

John Finnie: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret Mitchell: I am sorry; I would like to make progress.

One way in which to ensure that victims of crime and members of the public have confidence in our police force involves visible local policing. It is therefore deeply concerning and a retrograde step that, in communities such as Uddingston, not only did Police Scotland close the police counters several years ago, it is now selling off property that police officers have been using as a base in the area. Although it is no longer functioning as an active police counter, members of the public in Uddingston found it reassuring that police officers had been using the station for their breaks. Now there is no such visible policing.

The Minister for Community Safety, James Dornan and the VRU have highlighted the excellent work carried out training hairdressers, vets and firefighters to identify signs of domestic abuse. That is a good example of the necessary early intervention to which John Finnie, Daniel Johnson and Ruth Maguire referred.

John Finnie: Will the member give way?

Margaret Mitchell: I want to make progress, please.

I want to commend and raise awareness about the fantastic animal guardians programme that is run by the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which tackles violent behaviour in children and young people. The programme is funded solely through charitable donations and the R S Macdonald Charitable Trust and works in collaboration with social work, educational psychologists, children and adolescent mental

health services, specialist teachers and children charities such as Barnardo's.

Those stakeholders refer children who either have committed animal cruelty or have the potential to commit animal cruelty to the SSPCA. The SSPCA then works with those children on a one-to-one basis in a fun and non-threatening way and encourages them to recognise both their own emotions and what the animal may be feeling. Since the programme launched in May, the SSPCA has been inundated with referrals, with children as young as four years old being referred.

Ruth Maguire: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Mitchell is finishing.

Margaret Mitchell: Given that, on average, 14 children a week are excluded from schools in Scotland for assault with a weapon, that SSPCA programme is clearly invaluable.

Quite simply, it is only by ensuring transparency and honesty about the level of violent crime that it can be tackled effectively and victims can have confidence to report it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to close the debate. You have seven minutes, cabinet secretary.

16:52

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): I have had the great honour and pleasure of opening and closing many debates in Parliament in my six and a half years of being a Government minister. In closing a debate, I do not think that I could be prouder than I am today of the achievements of the VRU and how we are celebrating its undeniable success.

I am unashamedly Glasgow born, bred and educated. I represent a part of that city. As James Dornan suggested, while growing up in Glasgow there were undoubtedly some areas that I would not go to, especially as a young Asian male. I would avoid those areas because, if nothing else, of the perception that something could happen to me.

That is not so, now. I am so proud that we have moved on in leaps and bounds in my home city. If someone had told me when I was growing up that Glasgow would be held up as a model for violence reduction for the rest of the world, I would have thought that they had been downing too many bottles of Irn-Bru. I would not have believed it.

It is right that we all, across the chamber, recognise that great success. We should all be collectively proud that the World Economic Forum has held up the VRU as a great model. Labour's mayor in London, Sadiq Khan, will replicate the

VRU model for London. We should all be proud of the list of countries that Ash Denham read out that are looking at the VRU model.

Many of us in the chamber—or our political parties—have been part of the success. Ash Denham mentioned the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition that came up with the idea under Cathy Jamieson, who was the Minister for Justice at the time. In Glasgow, as has been mentioned many times during the debate, not just the current city administration, but the previous one have believed in the model. There is also ongoing work that the Government has been taking forward. We should all be collectively proud.

The downward trend is really important. I emphasise the word “trend”. It is an important word, because it is very easy to take figures over one year or two years. I am not dismissing those figures, and it is right that members mention them, particularly in relation to their constituencies or regions, but it is important that we look at the long-term trends, which are absolutely undeniable. They show that recorded violent crimes have fallen by 49 per cent since 2006, which is the lowest level since 1974, that there has also been a 56 per cent fall in the total number of emergency admissions to hospital, and that the number of young people aged under 18 convicted of handling offensive weapons has fallen from 489 in 2006 to 91 in 2016-17.

Liam Kerr *rose*—

Humza Yousaf: I am about to come to a “but”. Before I do, I give way to Liam Kerr.

Liam Kerr: At the weekend, Niven Rennie said:

“When someone from government stands up and says crime is at a 43-year low, I always say it’s recorded crime that’s at a low.”

Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge his point?

Humza Yousaf: I do. I would like to emphasise the words “recorded crime”. Members were right to raise issues about unrecorded and unreported crime, and we should all pay attention to that aspect. The figure that was given that two thirds of crime goes unreported is incorrect and overestimates the position. Nonetheless, I accept the point.

I return to the substantial issues that I want to make in the relatively short time that I have. I want to reassure Liam Kerr, Margaret Mitchell and other Conservative members that we are absolutely not complacent. I put on record, as my predecessor did, that violent crime is too high. I give members an absolute assurance that we are not resting on our laurels. We consider that too many young people still carry knives—indeed, one young person carrying a knife is one too many. We want

to tackle unreported crime, and there have been many good suggestions from across the chamber about how we might do that.

I will touch on one other issue that was raised in the debate. In doing so, I will try as best I can to rise above the politics of the issue—here comes another “but”—but there is one thing that I cannot let go, which is the Conservative’s accusation about falling police numbers under the SNP.

Daniel Johnson *rose*—

Humza Yousaf: I will give way to Daniel Johnson shortly.

There are 938 more officers than we inherited when we came to power, but there has been a decrease of 19,588 officers in England and Wales. For the Conservatives to accuse us of letting police numbers fall when their own Government has presided over a 13 per cent reduction is hypocrisy of the worst kind.

Daniel Johnson: On the numbers, does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that, since 2013, we have lost more than 300 officers from local divisions? Furthermore, will he acknowledge that we have seen increases in non-sexual violent crimes in 2015-2016 and 2016-17? Will he outline what he will do if increases continue to be seen in the next data release?

Humza Yousaf: I will. It is important to listen to what the police say about the argument of centralised versus localised policing. In fact, one of the great things about Police Scotland is the ability to use a national resource to have a major local impact. I do not dismiss the point that there can be figures covering periods of one year or two years that we should take note of, which is important.

I will come back to non-sexual offences and sexual offences. Unfortunately, we have seen—I use the word purposely—a rising trend in sexual offences.

I come to the other political parties and their amendments. We will accept Daniel Johnson’s amendment. His speech was very thoughtful, as I have often found him to be. His point about ensuring that we invest is important. I have a list of investments that we have made but, because of the time, I will not mention them.

I join members from across the chamber who considered that the amendment that was lodged by Liam MacArthur but not accepted for debate was very good. It included an important point about through care. I assure him that, in the next few months, the Scottish Government will be working with community justice partners to see what more we can do about that.

Neil Findlay: Will the minister give way?

Humza Yousaf: I really do not have time. I hope that the member will forgive me, but I am coming to the end of my speech.

Liam Kerr talked a lot about the accuracy of figures, but there is an inaccuracy in his amendment. It would have been sensible to have withdrawn the amendment, because the VRU provided clarification on the reported comments.

I know that time is against me, but as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, I will repeat the central point without apology. I appeal to all colleagues, but especially Conservative members, never to fall into the trap of suggesting that there is a tension between strengthening the rights of victims—which must happen—and rehabilitation of offenders, because they are two sides of the same coin. If we truly want fewer victims of crime, we must preserve the hope of rehabilitation. I think that Daniel Johnson used that phrase in a previous debate.

Liam Kerr talked about difficult decisions; I do not doubt that I and the Government have difficult decisions to make, but so, too, do Liam Kerr and other Opposition members. I have often found Liam Kerr to be very thoughtful and not reactionary when I have dealt with him one to one. I say to him that all the evidence on the issue is irrefutable. Short sentences of less than 12 months are simply nowhere near as effective in rehabilitating offenders as community payback orders. My challenge to Liam Kerr is to examine the evidence, speak to the experts and, when it comes to the presumption against short sentences of less than 12 months, to do the right thing.

I appreciate that I am running over time. I give the last word to Callum Hutchison, one of the people who are involved in street and arrow, which is a project that has been mentioned by members of all parties. He said:

“The SVRU has absolutely transformed my life. They have helped repair a broken person. They believed in me when no one else did. Iain Murray my project lead gave me the opportunity to become a trainee with Street and Arrow, which gave me hope in the future. I’m now a mentor helping guys just like myself and it is the most rewarding thing I have ever done. The ripple effect from the SVRU helping me is massive, my family get the benefits, my community get the benefits, I’m no longer a drain on the NHS or in prison. Everyone at the SVRU has helped me get to a place I never thought was possible where I have peace in my life”.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The question is, that amendment S5M-13995.1, in the name of Liam Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S5M-13995, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on violence reduction in Scotland, progress and future priorities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)

Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 27, Against 86, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-13995.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S5M-13995, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on violence reduction in Scotland, progress and future priorities, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S5M-13995, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on violence reduction in Scotland, progress and future priorities, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 86, Against 0, Abstentions 26.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the World Economic Forum's recent recognition of Scotland's progress in turning its record on violence around; notes that, through a public health approach, police recorded crime, the number of accident and emergency admissions and the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey results, including incidents not reported to police, all indicate a significant reduction in violent crime over the last decade; recognises the role of the Violence Reduction Unit, which was established in 2005, in driving these reductions in partnership with a range of public and third sector partners, and acknowledges the importance of support for victims and their families who are affected by crime, along with prevention, early intervention and services that support rehabilitation and ultimately reduce reoffending to ensure that violence continues to reduce across Scotland; notes that the success of the public health approach will be at risk unless public and third sector partners are properly funded; further notes with concern that numbers of non-sexual violent crimes have increased by 14% in the last two years, while the clear-up rate has fallen from 84% to 77%, and encourages the Scottish Government to investigate the reasons for this recent trend, which has seen a stall in the long-term progress in reducing violent crime.

Meeting closed at 17:04.

Correction

Kevin Stewart has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart):

At col 8, paragraph 3—

Original text—

I am aware of the concerns that have been expressed about the Highland Council's proposals to close a number of public toilets, and I discussed that with the council leader on 15 June. At that meeting, I made it clear that, although it is for the council to take decisions on its services, the council should engage with local communities before taking any decisions and should consider the potential longer-term impact on tourism in the area, rather than just short-term financial savings.

Corrected text—

I am aware of the concerns that have been expressed about the Highland Council's proposals to close a number of public toilets, and that this was discussed with the council leader on 15 June. At that meeting, Ms Hyslop made it clear that, although it is for the council to take decisions on its services, the council should engage with local communities before taking any decisions and should consider the potential longer-term impact on tourism in the area, rather than just short-term financial savings.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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